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THE CAREER PATH OF THE FEMALE SUPERINTENDENT: WHY SHE LEAVES

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Acknowledgment

I have been living with this dissertation for many years. From the first kernel of an idea while I was working in PPK-12 and fascinated by the career paths of the women I watched around the state, through the opportunity to interview 20 spectacular women, and finally to put all these stories and ideas into a completed work...I have struggled to finish this study because I haven't wanted it to end. I have come to realize, however, that it doesn't have to end. In fact, sharing the stories of these women superintendents is proving to be just my beginning.

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Abstract

THE CAREER PATH OF THE WOMAN SUPERINTENDENT: WHY SHE LEAVES

Kerry K. Robinson, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2013

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This qualitative study used a phenomenological approach to determine the reasons why women leave the superintendency. This study not only illustrated the different ways a woman can leave the position of superintendent but also the reasons she would choose to leave. These reasons can be either positive or negative, but they rarely are the sole cause for why a woman leaves the position.

This interview study of 20 female participants who served as superintendent in the Commonwealth of Virginia identified four main themes as to why a woman chose to leave the superintendency. These included: (a) it wasn't the job I thought it would be; (b) the struggles with family; (c) taking care of herself; and (d) I'm not the right fit for the community. The study also identified the routes women take to leave the superintendency which include retirement, leaving for another superintendency, movement into another position within PK-12, opportunity in higher education, working as an educational consultant, or moving into a position outside of education.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Is the superintendency in trouble? Over the years of research on the superintendency, studies have emerged highlighting the difficulty enticing people to aspire to the position (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Cooper, Fusarelli, & Carella, 2000; Ottino, 2009), the short tenure of the superintendent (Grissom & Andersen, 2012; Grogan, 2000a; Natkin et al., 2002; Yee & Cuban, 1996), and the fear that there won't be enough people to fill the positions at some point (Cooper et al, 2000; Esparó & Rader, 2001; Riede, 2003). These studies and their findings often remain in a very academic environment.

The media also has a fascination with the position of superintendent. They too often ask questions similar to the researchers, but they are most interested in splashy stories. Coverage of long-serving superintendents are only ever mentioned if they are viewed in contrast to a superintendent who is being ousted. If one went solely by newspaper and televisions accounts of the superintendency, there would be a distorted view that the position (especially in large, urban districts) was a revolving door that a person could not hold the position very long. Add in some headline grabbing issues like cheating scandals, budget impasses, student redistricting, clashes with school boards, conflicts with stakeholders, or leaving one high profile district for another, and the public is very interested to know why there is such upheaval in the position. This coupled with the cost of losing a superintendent (especially if the board has to buy out the replaced leader), as well as finding and hiring a replacement, all using tax dollars, provides an even greater interest in what's going on with the leader of the school system.

One thing the media neglects to do, but that research has done quite well, is to show the ever changing complexity of the position of superintendent. Historically, the role of the superintendent was to serve as the manager of the school district; however, the current position looks very different than what an earlier job description of the superintendent might look like. Over time, the position has become much more instructional in focus (Björk, 1993). The introduction of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* forced the position into one that would be much more involved with the intricacies of creating conditions for learning. Waters and Marzano (2006) found a statistically significant relationship that the superintendent does make a difference in a district. They provide five district-level responsibilities that have a statistically significant correlation with student achievement in the district. These include: collaborative goal setting, non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction, board alignment and support of district goals, monitoring goals for achievement and instruction, and use of resources to support achievement and instructional goals (p. 3).

Over the past four years, a primary focus of the superintendency has shifted again to now struggling with diminishing school district budgets. The challenge for the district leader is to figure out how to work with a decrease in overall dollars without diminishing the level of academic service to students. With ARRA (*American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009*) funds running out and the continuing fear of sequestration, school district budgets are projected by sitting superintendents to be more challenging than ever before. *The Buffalo News*' published a recent article claiming that 50 percent of New York State superintendents believe their districts will run out of money in four years (Buffalo News 12/2/12). In Virginia, sequestration would

cause major state cuts in education, which would affect each of the 136 school divisions of the Commonwealth. According to the Winter 2012 issue of *VASS News*, 90% of the surveyed superintendents in Virginia are expecting crippling budget shortfalls for their divisions because of the Governor's mandate to send state educational funding to help make the Virginia Retirement System (VRS) more solvent. The additional funds going to VRS mean school divisions will have to work with much less.

In the upcoming years, a more critical eye will be focused on the superintendency with states' adoption of a formal evaluation system for superintendent standards. These evaluation systems will provide concrete measures for whether or not a superintendent is performing successfully within her or his district. As the most recent AASA Decade study on the superintendency (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2011) explained:

Now more than ever, the work portfolio of America's school superintendents is increasingly diverse: they are responsible for student progress and achievement while balancing the diversification of their student and staff populations, the explosion of technology and the digital divide, an expanded set of expectations and involvement from the federal level, the media, and board and community relations, all in the context of an increasingly globalized education system (p. xiii).

With this very bleak picture of the position painted, there are still men and women who aspire to the superintendency and who are operating successfully in the position. Overall, the subject of the superintendency is an under researched topic, especially in

comparison to the research conducted on the principalship and all aspects of that position.

Overview

Similarly, while there has been a great deal of research conducted in the area of educational administration, the majority of the research has been conducted with the assumption that the administrator is a man. Over the past 20 years, there has been an increase in the research on the role of women in educational leadership, including the superintendency. The research has focused primarily on the topics of unequal access for women and the career paths that women take to the superintendency. Much less research has been focused on the retention of female superintendents.

Statement of the Problem

Research has established that women superintendents encounter barriers in both achieving the superintendency and retaining the position. These barriers may also have an effect on why women choose to leave the position of superintendent. While some female superintendents choose to leave because of retirement or movement to another district, the greater concern is for women who abandon the position of superintendent altogether. The stories behind how and why a woman leaves the superintendency have not received an adequate and focused exploration.

Rationale for the Study

It is an expensive proposition to replace a superintendent. There are a number of costs associated with this transition. First, there is the payout of the superintendent's contract if there is an early termination. Second, are the costs associated with finding a replacement. Finally, there is the salary and benefits for the newly hired superintendent.

Search assistance can be arranged through state school board associations or through private search firms. The overall fee for the searches often depends on the type of search assistance (school board association versus search firm) as well as the size of the district. The costs of the search often include consultant fees, advertising, mailings, travel/lodging/expenses for consultants and finalists, as well as renting interview space. Searches can cost less than \$10,000 to more than \$50,000 based on all of the factors of the search. For smaller or rural school districts, these costs can be especially prohibitive (Glass, 2000; Vaughan, 2007).

In addition to the large financial strain a departing superintendent can put on a district, another devastating cost cannot be measured in dollars; this is the loss of institutional knowledge when a leader leaves a district. This is especially significant when the superintendent was promoted from within, bringing with them years of understanding of district norms and expectations. According to Grogan and Brunner (2005a), 45 percent of women superintendents they surveyed were promoted from within their districts and that often the larger the district, the more often the woman will be promoted from inside. Whether a woman is promoted from inside or achieves the position from outside the district, the goal is to keep her successfully working in the position.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine – through the stories and experiences of women who have held the position – why women leave the superintendency. By conducting a qualitative interview study, I am able to go beyond what a traditional survey might provide me, “average” superintendent answers. Instead,

I wanted the stories of the individuals who could provide me “depth, nuance, complexity and roundedness in data” (Mason, 2002, p. 65).

Significance of the Study

This research adds to the body of knowledge on women in the superintendency. In addition, there is a need for research on women superintendents who choose to leave their superintendencies (either to pursue other superintendencies or to abandon the position entirely) in order to hear the reasons that contribute to them exiting the position. In addition, there is also a need for the research to share stories so that women’s perspectives are heard in the field of the superintendency. Finally, there is a need to share the findings and insights gained from these stories with various groups: educational leadership programs at universities, school boards, “head hunters,” search firms, and superintendents associations that mentor superintendents.

Research Questions

Based on the direction of the literature review, this study will attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. What factors cause women superintendents to leave the superintendency?
2. How do women construct the story of their leaving the superintendency?

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations.

1. Women employed as superintendents in Virginia between 1985-2010 and left a superintendency.
2. Professional and personal challenges of the participants were studied.

3. Professional and personal reasons that women superintendents may consider as reasons for leaving the superintendency were researched.

Limitations.

1. Only 20 women participated in the interview study so additional reasons for leaving and other viewpoints may have been missed.
2. A smaller percentage of African American superintendents participated than their Caucasian counterparts.
3. Comfort level with the topic and honesty of answers may limit the study results.
4. The validity of the data collected due to the passage of time since exiting the position of superintendent.
5. The absence of data from the school divisions in which the superintendents served.
6. Personal interest in the topic by the researcher may cause a possible bias.
7. The possibility that the views of the superintendents in the study are not typical of the views held by exiting male superintendents.
8. The possibility that the views of the superintendents in this study are not typical of the views held by exiting superintendents in other states.

Definition of Terms

While I will define a number of terms for the purpose of this study, I would like to highlight the following five terms because it is extremely important that the reader understand how I am categorizing the ways in which women leave the position of superintendent.

Leavers – women who leave the superintendency they are in to move to another superintendency or abandon the position.

Movers – women who leave one superintendency to move directly into another superintendency.

Abandoners – women who leave the position of superintendent altogether (abandoners can include retirees)

Retirees – women who abandon the superintendency and then no longer work

Vested – women who have earned the required number of years to receive full benefits from the state retirement program.

School Division – synonymous with school district. In Virginia, a superintendent is in charge of all schools grades PK-12 within their division/district.

Organization of the Study

There are five chapters in this dissertation. Chapter One includes the statement of the problem, the rationale and significance of the study, and the research questions. Delimitations and limitations of the study are presented, and definitions of the terms used throughout the dissertation are also presented in Chapter One.

Chapter Two reviews the literature relevant to the study. The chapter will begin broadly with a review of previous research on women in the superintendency. The chapter will also cover a review of women and power; why people leave positions of power; and why women leave positions of power. The final two sections of Chapter Two synthesize the research on why superintendents leave and then finally why women leave the superintendency.

The research methodology is the content of Chapter Three. This section first describes my rationale for conducting a qualitative inquiry followed by the theoretical perspective for the study. Chapter Three also presents my participant selection as well as the ethical considerations in working with human participants and the process I followed for data collection. Finally, I end Chapter Three with an explanation of how I conducted my data analysis (share what all of the headings in this chapter would be).

Chapter Four presents the findings related to the research questions. There are four themes that emerged regarding why a woman left the position of superintendent. The first finding was the woman found the job was not what she thought it would be. The second theme dealt with the struggles tied to family. The third theme explored a superintendent's ability to take care of herself. The final theme was when a superintendent realized she was not a fit for the community.

The final chapter of the dissertation, Chapter Five, provides a brief summary of the topic, conclusions about the findings, as well as recommendations and areas of future research consideration.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Women in the superintendency

In order to represent the body of research on the topic of women in the superintendency, this research can be broken down into stages. Shakeshaft (1999) created a framework based on Schuster and Van Dyne's (1984) stages. Shakeshaft's framework explores women in the superintendency through the stages of research on women in educational administration. She contends "research on women and gender in educational administration has progressed through six stages in the evolution of a paradigmatic shift" (p. 113). Björk (2000) applies Shakeshaft's framework specifically to women in the position of superintendent. These six stages include: a historical investigation of women in the position of superintendent, chronicling accounts of consummate female superintendents, barriers experienced by women aspiring to administrative positions, using a feminist lens to explore administration, gender effects on leadership theory, and transformation of research to incorporate both women's and men's experiences.

Historical investigations of women in the position of superintendent.

The vast majority of research on women superintendents has occurred within this first stage. These studies often provide a descriptive demographic analysis of the number of women serving in the position of school superintendent (Björk, 2000). While the role of superintendent operates as the most powerful position in a school system, it has consistently remained the most gender-stratified occupation in the United States (Björk, 1999; Skrla, 2000). The United States Census Bureau has also identified the superintendency the most male-dominated executive position of any profession in the

country (Glass, 1992). This is especially disconcerting since the entire workforce of Pre-K through twelve education is 75% female (Skrla, 2000). In exploring the history of the position of the superintendency, Buffalo, New York and Louisville, Kentucky are identified as creating the first positions of local school superintendents in 1837 (Grieder, Pierce, & Jordan, 1969). By 1850, the position of superintendent of schools existed in the school systems of thirteen large cities (Kowalski, 2005). Since the beginning, the position has been defined and institutionalized as men's work (Blount, 1998; Grogan, 1999; Skrla, 1999; & Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000). This was perpetuated by the perceived skills needed by the person filling the position. The role of superintendent became one that emphasized management. The goal of the position was to improve overall district functions by emphasizing time and efficiency (Tyack & Hansot, 1982). This emphasis of superintendent as manager kept the position male dominant for a number of decades.

Blount (1998) conducted a historical study of women in the superintendency. Her review of the annually published Report of the Commissioner of Education provided access to the information about the sex of school system employees. The 1873 report found reference to women superintendents and the "practice in western states of electing women county superintendents represented a novel experiment that should be watched closely" (p. 172). Since the beginning of the twentieth century, however, as the number of women in education increased, so did the number of superintendents. Blount (1998) found that in 1920 approximately 9% of all superintendents in the United States were women. This percentage increased to 11% by 1930. The growth in women in the

position at this time corresponded with the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment granting women the right to vote.

Growth in women ascending to the superintendency did not continue, however. In fact, the conclusion of World War II had a detrimental effect on the percentage of women in the position. The schools and society as a whole “witnessed a revival of the prejudices against women that had hindered their advancement into administration from the colonial period onward” (Shakeshaft, 1987, p. 48). This decline continued until 1971, where the American Association of School Administrators’ *The American School Superintendent: An AASA Research Study* identified that only 1.3% of all superintendent positions in the United States were held by women (Knezevich, 1971).

As the study of women in educational administration grew, so, too, did the percentage of women achieving the position of superintendent. For example, by 1992, approximately 7% of the superintendents were women (Glass, 1992). While the representation of women in all areas of educational administration continues to grow, certain positions continue to be dominated by men. These include high school principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent (Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999). Further studies conducted by the American Association of School Superintendents found that in 2000, 13.2% of superintendents were women (Glass, Björk & Brunner, 2000) and by 2003, 18.2% of superintendents were women (Grogan & Brunner, 2005a). While this percentage has continued to increase, it is still considerably underrepresented, especially since over half of all students enrolled in educational leadership programs are female as well as 75% of teachers the initial pool from which superintendents are drawn (Glass, Björk & Brunner, 2000). In addition, Björk, Glass &

Brunner (2005) discovered that the vast majority of female superintendents in 2000 were in their first superintendency (71%). From this same survey they also determined that 58% of these women had held the position for less than five years. These final statistics highlight that while the overall percentages are growing, the progress has been recent.

Chronicling accounts of consummate female superintendents.

While it is important to study the overall historical timeline of women in the position of superintendent, the second stage of research focuses on the investigation of noteworthy female superintendents. Research consistently highlights the same women superintendents as “accomplished” (Björk, 2000; Blount, 1998). These women most noted for their accomplishments held their positions between 1850 and 1910. Carrie Chapman Catt held the position of superintendent in Mason City, Iowa, before leading the National American Women Suffrage Association. Betty Mix Cowles convened the first Women’s Convention in Ohio in 1850 before becoming superintendent of schools for Canton, Ohio, between 1850 and 1855. Ella Flagg Young gained the position of superintendent for Chicago, Illinois, in 1909. Finally, Grace Strachan was highlighted for achieving the position of superintendent of the New York City schools. Björk (2000) explains that these histories “not only is contributing to a more complete picture of women in school leadership but also is stimulating considerable debate within the field of educational administration, particularly discourse on the role of women in the superintendency in the 21st century” (p. 8).

This examination and collection of noteworthy female superintendents continues through research studies and dissertations that cover the study of women from a

number of states across the country (Brunner, 1995; Brunner, 2000; Cahoon, 2001; Guptill, 2003; Hackett, 1997; McAndrew, 2002; Olzendam, 1999). Brunner (2000) explains that she was most interested in uncovering exemplary women superintendents. “For the purpose of this study *successful* superintendents was defined as women superintendents whom others consider to be capable, effective, respected, and well supported by others” (p. 79).

Barriers experienced by women aspiring to the superintendency.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the third stage of research emerged. This research focused on the issue of barriers experienced by women striving for educational leadership positions, the factors that contributed to this group being disadvantaged, and finally were there policies and practices in place attempting to correct these barriers (Chase & Bell, 1990; Ortiz, 2000). Shakeshaft (1987) identified that barriers could be labeled as either internal or external. Internal barriers that kept women out of key educational leadership positions included “low self-image, lack of confidence, and lack of motivation or aspiration” (Shakeshaft, 1987, p. 83). These findings were echoed by earlier studies conducted in the 1970s that suggested that women were often their own worst enemies in keeping them from administrative positions (Dias, 1975; Gross & Trask, 1976; Sample, 1976).

More often, research shows the barriers keeping women from the superintendency are external ones. Björk (2000) finds “that the near absence of women in the superintendency may have less to do with their lack of training, availability, or presence in the administrator pipeline than do other factors related to the search and selection process” (p. 9). This is especially evident when data suggest that more women

are enrolled in educational administration degrees than men (Bell & Chase, 1993; Glass, Björk & Brunner, 2000; Grogan, 1996; Murphy, 1993; Tingley, 1996). At the same time, only 10% of females enrolled in doctoral programs in educational leadership ultimately pursue the credentials for the superintendency (Glass, 2000).

One of the greatest perceived external barriers is the role of the gatekeepers to the superintendency. A number of research studies identify the role of school boards and search consultants in keeping women from the position (Brunner, 1999; Castro, 1992; Kamler & Shakeshaft, 1999; Tallerico, 2000). If the gatekeepers hold traditional, stereotypical gender views, and this shapes their ideas of “masculine” leadership qualities, then women have a difficult battle earning positions of power in those districts (Bell, 1988; Blackmore, 1999; Skrla, 2000). Grogan and Henry (1995) found that many held a “male-centered, ‘warrior, military, or business mentality’ that dominates board members’ conceptions of the superintendency to the disadvantage of female superintendent candidates” (p. 172). Women who participated in the AASA study of 2000 felt that the school boards were particularly stringent gatekeepers. Eighty-two percent of women responded that the school board perceived that women are not strong managers, 76% felt boards did not view them as capable to manage district finances, and 61% felt a “glass ceiling” did exist in educational leadership (Glass, 2000).

Tallerico (2000) conducted qualitative research of superintendent candidates, “headhunters,” and school board members. She found “social prejudices, gender stereotyping, and androcentric or ethnocentric constructions of leadership, and certain ideologies that...narrow the flow channels to the superintendency for those who are not White males” (p. 32). While Kamler & Shakeshaft’s (1999) study found that women were

making it as finalists, they were not being selected for the position of superintendent. “This is a change from a decade ago, when women were not presented as finalists. Nevertheless, national statistics confirm that although women have made it into the candidate pool, they are still not being hired in proportion to their numbers in the profession or their skills as administrators” (p. 58).

When trying to secure an executive position like the superintendency, as the previous research has demonstrated, women do face additional challenges. Bell (1995) found that women needed to transform to become employable.

Like men, women in the professions must prove themselves to employers.

However, unlike men, women must prove themselves to be different from a negative stereotype of others like them (i.e. women in general). This often pressures women into doing their own “de-feminization” by encouraging them to differentiate themselves from other women (p. 290).

This attempt to distance themselves from other women in order to secure a position can have other disastrous results. There are fewer opportunities for female role models, mentors and support systems (Beekley, 1999; Radich, 1992).

Using a feminist lens to explore the superintendency.

During the 1990s the fourth stage of research emerged. This stage “uses female perspectives to guide research on women’s experiences in administration – how women superintendents perceive, construct, and enact their roles in a male-dominated profession” (Björk, 2000, p. 10). The impact of this research is that a common theme has emerged. It confirms that women approach the role of educational leadership differently than their male counterparts. By conceptualizing research in the framework of

feminist epistemology, research on female administrators allows the world to experience the way women see the world. “A feminist approach thus validates personal experience and is theoretically informed by an understanding of marginality, given women’s history of social and cultural subordination in the public world” (Gardiner, Enomoto, & Grogan, 2000, p. 32). In other words, research that views the world through a feminist lens.

The power of a feminist lens is its ability to focus on the gaps and blank spaces of male-dominant culture, knowledge, and behavior. Through this lens we can locate in the spaces, women and other marginalized groups who have been excluded from the development of knowledge. If we step into these spaces without lens, we begin to see more clearly that those characteristics of gender, which we are taught to accept as natural, are really constructed from the values, beliefs, and assumptions of the dominant culture” (Gosetti & Rusch, 1995, p. 15).

Women educational leaders tend to be child-centered in leading their systems and they have an extensive background in curriculum and instruction which they hope to translate into effective learning climates (Andrews & Basom, 1990; Dillard, 1995; Fansher & Buxton, 1984; Grogan, 1996). “They seek the job out of interest, confidence, and a desire to make schools better for children” (Beekley, 1999, p. 161). Wesson and Grady (1994) found that school boards most often hired women superintendents for the purpose of managing change. This emphasis on instructional leadership of the system has become even more prevalent after the passing of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (Varley, 2004).

Research has also emerged that shows that women's leadership styles are often more collaborative and facilitative than male leaders. They are interested in moving the best idea forward, not necessarily their idea forward (Brunner, 1997; Grogan, 1996; Grogan & Smith, 1998; Gupton & Slick, 1996; Hill & Ragland, 1995; Marshall, Patterson, Rogers, & Steele, 1996; Regan & Brooks, 1995). Because of their interest in building capacity through relationships and teamwork, women leaders often regularly solicit input from parents and community members. Grogan (1999) refers to this strength as relational leadership. By emphasizing these leadership capabilities as strengths, Björk (2000) suggests "alternate forms of leadership may move from marginal status to the center of practice in the field" (p. 12).

Gender effects on leadership theory.

The fifth stage addresses how a leader's gender affects the human behavior in a school organization. Shakeshaft (1999) poses two questions to frame the research of this stage. Are male-oriented theories relevant to women administrators? If not, how can research address empirical work and leadership theories that would be essential to women leaders? Most research conducted in educational leadership has focused a masculine lens on the theories of leadership (Brunner, 1998; Gossetti & Rusch, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1987; Wesson & Grady, 1994). Gossetti and Rusch (1995) found that many leadership books and seminars aimed at aspiring administrators provide pointers that "perpetuate our idea of a leader as the embodiment of all that is male" (p. 18).

Shakeshaft (1987) emphasizes those educational theories that emerge solely from a masculine framework do not represent female leaders because they are biased, inaccurate and imbalanced. Instead theories need to be expanded to include the values,

beliefs, and experiences of women leaders (Campbell, 1996). Grogan (2000a) explains that once women become a critical part of the discussion, then there will be a transformation of leadership and the position of the superintendent. By only taking into account one perspective, a true theory of leadership cannot be identified. "If women and men were the same, if they behaved in similar ways, then leaving women out of the formulation of theory wouldn't be a problem" (Shakeshaft, 1987, p. 163).

Transformation of research to incorporate both women's and men's experiences.

While the previous stages emphasized the importance of researching women leaders and taking into account the female perspective in formulating theory, Shakeshaft (1999) suggests the sixth stage of feminist research recognizes in order to develop a true picture of leadership requires "understanding women's and men's experiences together" (p. 115). One of the most effective ways to address this stage is to not only identify and research women's leadership experiences and qualities of leading, but to ultimately conduct comparisons to their male counterparts (Björk, 2000).

Women and power

Chase (1995) asked the women superintendents in her study to define the word power. Several of these women had difficulty doing it. One of the female superintendents responded "I'm always a little bit surprised when people talk about the power that one holds as a superintendent because it really doesn't seem that particular concept of what power has been is part of *my* definition" (p. 84). Brunner (2000) agreed with Chase (1995):

Women in my study struggled when talking about power. Because it was

not safe to talk about it in most settings, they did not have the language to talk about it even in the safety of a private interview. This struggle was especially intense given the fact that they occupied a position that is viewed as powerful – the superintendency (p. 85).

Brunner (1998) discovered that “women separated themselves from the definition of power as control, authority, or dominance over others...to understand that perceiving the self as separate from the dominant culture’s notion of power as power over seemed to be necessary for a woman to be truly collaborative. Genuine collaboration occurs when all participants are considered equals” (p. 156). Shakeshaft (1987) explains that women see power as a shared responsibility and a way to promote others ideas. Brunner (1995) articulates the ways women superintendents use and define their power.

Women define power as “power to,” that is, as the ability to empower others to make their own decisions collaboratively and to carry them through a collective, inclusive model. Men, on the other hand, view power as “power over,” or the ability of one to convince others to do as he wished through any means possible (p. 21).

Colwill (1993) examined power as it applied to women in management roles. She concluded, “The lack of women in management is an issue, not of education and training, but of power” (p. 81). This belief is echoed by Blackmore (1999) in a study of female administrators, who contends that the term power has negative undertones for women. “The ongoing dilemma remained, however; to desire or claim power was in itself unwomanly” (p. 161).

Why people leave positions of power

The majority of research that addresses why people exit positions tends to focus generally on the characteristics. Fewer studies take into account the differences between why men leave versus why women exit. Research studies have addressed principals leaving (in both the United States and the Netherlands) and head teachers in the United Kingdom.

Spencer and Kochan (2000) conducted a statewide study of 514 male and female principals in Alabama to identify reasons for leaving the position. Principals were asked to choose from a list of 14 possible reasons. In the case of both men and women principals, the number one reason given for departing was to assume a better position. While the majority of other responses were similar between men and women, some important differences emerged. Females consistently ranked frustration with attaining goals, the need for having more time with family, and time needed to do the job much higher than male counterparts did in their decisions to retire.

Krüger, van Eck, and Vermeulen (2005) conducted a study determining the risk factors for why principals leave. They also determined whether this departure was different for women than for men. The researchers deliberately chose specific terms to highlight the phenomenon of leaving.

(T)he term 'premature departure' is used to refer to departure which took place against the will of the person concerned. Some principals are dismissed, others decide to resign in order to avoid dismissal, others are forced to leave because of the tense work situation and labour conflicts as a result of which they get burnt out

or sick, but premature departure is always against the will of the principal (p. 242).

This study surveyed 877 primary principals and 132 secondary principals in the Netherlands. All principals had experienced a level of job mobility. The results showed that women leaders have a significantly higher percentage of premature leaving (35.5%) than male leaders (24.9%).

From the case studies it emerged that women themselves also mention resignation as an important reason for their premature departure more often than men. More than half of the women interviewed (9 out of 17) handed in their resignation, whereas only two out of ten male principals did so. Women also, more often than men, appear to accept a lower position in the school organization, offered to them in case of conflicts and problems. The official reason to leave prematurely given by governors [superintendents] for male principals is – more often than for women – dismissal on the basis of incompetence or disability.

Remarkably, the men who left prematurely ended up in a legal procedure much more often than the women: 7 out of 10 men interviewed (p. 256).

Why do leaders, men or women, leave anyway? Research conducted by Chaplain (2001) examined stress and job satisfaction among primary head teachers (male and female) of 36 schools. The researchers found four categories of stress factors: school environments (maintaining educational standards and fiscal responsibilities); the quality of relationships with staff and parents; external factors like the governing bodies; and personal factors.

One traditional way of exiting a position is through retirement. Very few studies have researched women and retirement (Dailey, 1998; Simmons & Betschild, 2001; Szinovacz, 1983). Research about retirement has been written largely about men by men (Hudson & Lee, 1990).

Why women leave positions of power

In general, the strongest stress women face is due to their personal belief systems. When they are in demanding and conflicting roles, high levels of stress can result. For example, high quality performance expectations in one's career can directly conflict with the demands of a mother who wants to spend quality time with her children (Smith, 1993). Another stressor includes the woman thinking she must be able to do everything. Deem and Ozga (1997) found that women often feel they must portray perfection as well as "all the characteristics of masculine, rational management in order to counteract inappropriate or hostile assumptions about women managers" (p. 35). Krüger, van Eck, and Vermeulen (2005) found that when women have disputes with their bosses, they often look towards mediation, but they rarely bring in an attorney to defend them. The research also showed that women more often choose to resign than their male counterparts. Even when leaving a position, most women are interested in avoiding conflicts.

Schmuck, Hollingsworth, and Lock (2002) studied four women leaders who left positions in a university setting. All four women agreed that maintaining a healthy lifestyle and fostering personal relationships were extremely difficult with the demanding schedules that their positions at the university required. Marquette University (2001) established the President's Task Force on Gender Equity. One cause of the inception of

this group was the decisions of several tenured women faculty members (including full professors) to leave Marquette University. The report of the subcommittee found that overall women were less likely than men to be actively searching for another position once they left Marquette. In fact, in most cases, women faculty members' departures were due to perceptions of poor organizational fairness at the university.

Melton-Livingston (2005) conducted a qualitative dissertation exploring the decisions of three retired female principals. Her study concluded that the women chose early retirement for two reasons: micromanagement by central office personnel (including the superintendent) and family needs. Melton-Livingston emphasized the importance of the Texas Retirement System providing a program to allow educators to retire as early as 52 and not have a detrimental effect on their retirement income. The study found that the women seemed more concerned about how they would fill their days after retiring more than the worry over the financial ramifications of retirement.

Women leave positions of power in fields other than education as well. Hewlett (2009) found that women business executives also had thoughts of leaving. In fact, they were twice as likely as their male counterparts – 84% compared to 40% - to consider leaving their current position. Women who have positions of power in very technical fields also often feel a struggle in their fields. One example Hewlett highlights is the plight of female leaders in engineering at Intel. Using data collected through exit interviews, the women divulged that they were not leaving due to family demands, but because they no longer felt challenged in their position or passionate about their jobs.

In *The Athena Factor: Reversing the Brain Drain in Science, Engineering, and Technology*, Hewlett et al. (2008) highlights that female executives in science,

engineering, and technology feel seriously isolated, without mentors or a network to provide support when they experience failure. These women believe that leaders in the areas of science, engineering, and technology (SET) do not get a second chance in a position once they fail the first time. This can have a detrimental effect in that it will deplete the opportunities for female mentors and role models available to women aspiring to SET careers.

Ryan and Haslam (2005) coined the term the “glass cliff.” This term describes women being promoted into high profile, difficult jobs where chances of success are minimal. Once the woman is appointed and the company fails, it is the woman executive that becomes associated with the failure. Then the women can be let go along with the failure. Ryan and Haslam plan on continuing research on the glass cliff to incorporate the analysis to include other marginalized groups (such as race, disability and age).

Why superintendents leave

When exploring studies on why men and women leave the position of superintendent, the research often focuses on how long people remain in the position as well as their reasons for departing. Is the length in tenure attributed to changes in the nature of the position of superintendent, in career opportunities for those in the position, or because of the interaction with members of the school community as well as the community at large? These questions have been asked by researchers since the early 1970s beginning with the work of Iannaccone & Lutz in 1970.

Tenure of the superintendent.

In any research that discusses superintendent departures, the topic of length of tenure is often explored. While a number of these research studies have addressed

tenure, it is the mainstream media that explains superintendent departure and tenure as a crisis. “Urban school superintendents around the country have been quitting in droves, or have been dismissed or have retired early, often because they have failed to deliver the quick educational fixes demanded of them” (Daley, 1990). In looking at the actual tenure lengths documented in a number of studies, however, the time in position appears relatively similar by gender as well as remaining relatively consistent over time. The greatest variance in length of tenure appeared to be caused by the sample surveyed in the study.

Early in the 1990s, Renschler (1992) found the national average of superintendency length to be 5.6 years. During that same year, however, in the *1992 Study of the American Superintendency*, Glass (1992) found the tenure length to be 6.47 years. Natkin et al., (2003) conducted a quantitative study looking at the longevity of superintendents in 292 districts between 1975 through 1999. They found that the tenure averaged between 6 and 7 years, regardless of the location of the district or the system’s size. Glass and Franceschini (2007) found that superintendent tenure rates consistently remain around six years, but the superintendents participating in *The State of the American School Superintendency: A Mid-Decade Study*, reported an average of 5.5 years in the position. This could be attributed to a large number of superintendents that were beginning their first superintendency. These averages hide the much shorter tenures of rural or urban superintendencies. In a study by Kamrath (2007) focusing on rural superintendents and an article by Buchanan (2004) highlighting urban superintendents, both findings emphasized that the tenures in these positions is shorter than their suburban counterparts. While the length of tenure is an important issue to

study, so too are the factors contributing to the length of the superintendent's stay in the position.

Reasons for exiting the position of superintendent.

In the *2000 Study of the American Superintendency*, the number one reason that superintendents leave their position is to move to a larger school system. This response indicates that many secure superintendent positions in smaller districts and once they gain experience, move to a larger system. This response was given by 37.9% of the superintendents surveyed (Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000). In comparison, Glass (1992) found that 46.9% of the superintendents surveyed in 1990 were leaving to move to a larger district. Cooper, Fusarelli, and Carella (2000) similarly found that those superintendents that were located in the smallest districts were most likely to move to a "good" job in another larger district. In the 2010 Decennial Study, 50.3% of those surveyed gave one of three answers regarding a "move upward" to a different superintendency. 11.4% of the participants moved because they "sought a higher performing school district." 30.3% wanted to "assume a new challenge." Finally, 8.6% reported they moved for "increased compensation."

Two relatively recent studies highlighted superintendent departures in individual states. A study conducted by Byrd, Drews, & Johnson (2006) found over 62% of Texas superintendents participating in their study left their position for a better superintendency. A second study that surveyed superintendent departures in Missouri reported that 93.8% left the position for the purpose of career advancement (Patillo, 2008). When moving to a larger district to advance one's career, there is often the reward of increased compensation which can include, salary, benefits, and bonuses

(Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000; Patillo, 2008). In some instances, the move can also mean an improved location over their current position (Czaja & Harman, 1997; Patillo, 2008). This new district also may provide the opportunity for more prestige in a higher-profile community (Grissom & Andersen, 2012; Parker, 1996). These particulars of a larger district – more money and improved location – are often categorized by the departing superintendents as better overall opportunities (Patillo, 2008). Czaja and Harman (1997) refer to this type of a departure as a “pull,” turnover that is caused by a promise of a more attractive district situation or better geographic location. This move can also provide “new goals and challenges that revitalize a superintendent’s career” (Patillo, 2008, p. 38).

Another response commonly given for leaving the position of superintendent is retirement. The *2000 Study of the American Superintendency* found that 5.9% of the 2,262 superintendents surveyed had left their last superintendency to retire. It is interesting to note, however, that they no longer were retired if they were completing the survey. These respondents were once again serving in the position of superintendent. In fact, Krantz (2004) found at least 30 percent of the superintendent positions in the state of Ohio are filled by previously retired superintendents. Goldberg (2010) found that many of the interim superintendents leading New Jersey school districts are retired superintendents. In the 2010 AASA study, the survey inquired about the superintendents’ career plans for 2015 and 42.5% of the respondents mentioned retirement. One group reported they would either be *retired but continuing to work part-time* (32.0%). The smaller percentage was those who planned to be *retired and not employed in any capacity* (01.5%).

Research conducted in individual states also found retirement to be a significant reason for leaving the position. Patillo's (2008) study of superintendents in Missouri found that 12.5% of the superintendents surveyed left due to retirement. Czaja and Harman (1997) conducted similar research of superintendent turnover in Texas. In these findings, 30.6% of all superintendent departures were retirements.

Finally, the career projections of current superintendents also can cause concern for the position. According Glass and Franceschini (2007), while surveying superintendents in 2006, just over 39% of all 1,338 respondents believed they would retire within the next five years. The high percentage of possible retirements return many to the possibility of the "career crisis" that Cooper, Fusarelli, and Carella (2000) researched previously. Their findings "indicate that sitting superintendents are strongly aware of a crisis in the profession, concerned about future recruiting of new and talented leaders, and worried about 'turnover' in the job" (p. 40).

Not all exits are choices for positive change in a superintendent's life, however. Goens (2005) describes the group that are helped to make a departure through some sort of conflict.

You can see it in their eyes – the hurt, the doubt, the humiliation, the embarrassment. They are "broken-wing" superintendents, those who have hit the glass wall of rejection and failure...This is not a new phenomenon. In a profession fraught with conflict, it is easy to run into the glass wall. Given a political and dynamic context replete with multiple and conflicting expectations, highly competent school leaders can easily be brought down. Inexperience can shorten flights. So can

tackling unwinnable battles over principle. Others crash because they react too quickly or too slowly. Some fly blindly in the shadows and fog of complex issues. And sometimes it is just plain time to go (p. 24).

Additional common conflicts that cause a superintendent to leave include issues with the school board, clashes with the community, and unrealistic job expectations.

One common response to why superintendents leave a district is the relationship they have with their school boards. Czaja and Harman (1997) explained the “pushes” that the departing superintendents felt when leaving their systems. Over 65% of the superintendents studied depart due to a conflict in the relationship between the school board and superintendent. Many of these cases involved termination or pressure to resign. In these situations, the superintendents that experienced this process indicated high levels of stress. Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, and Foleno (2001) found over 80% of the superintendents shared that successful superintendents leave the position because they feel frustrated with the politics and bureaucracy.

According to Glass, Björk, and Brunner (2000), 14.6% of the 2,262 superintendents surveyed in 2000 left districts due to conflicts with school board members. This percentage increased to 15.3% in the 2010 survey (Kowalski, et al., 2011). McCurdy (1992) explains departures over issues with school boards often involve tensions that arise between school board members and the superintendent over their perceived roles in the district. Glass and Franceschini (2007) explain that the relationship that forms between a school board and superintendent can often predict the success or failure of how the district is able to operate.

Conflicts between the superintendent and board naturally occur. If and

how they are resolved is an important key to creating an effective and efficient district. Successful resolution of conflicts is a mutual responsibility of the board and superintendent. If a conflict cannot be resolved, it is likely a superintendent change will occur through dismissal, retirement, or voluntary relocation to another district (p. 67).

A common conflict between superintendent and school board that often influences the superintendent to exit the position is due to the school board's micromanagement of the district (Harvey, 2003; Williams, 2007). Farkas, et al., (2001) reported that 65% of the superintendents hypothesized that many school boards hired a superintendent they knew could be controlled. Harvey (2003) summarizes that "the right thing for boards is the task of creating a vision, establishing goals, and setting policy; it is not meddling in the details of district administration or micromanaging schools" (p. 30). In fact, Patillo (2008) found that only 2% of the superintendents surveyed in her study in Missouri chose to leave because of school board turmoil. Glass and Franceschini (2007) clarify just how stormy the relations between board and superintendent tend to be. "Contract buyouts, nonrenewals, and firings are public dismissals and happen much more infrequently than portrayed in the media. The 10-year studies have always indicated that about 1-3% of superintendents are publically fired" (p.67).

When the relationship between school board and superintendent is viewed as effective and efficient, the makeup of the membership of that board is extraordinarily important. In most cases, seats on the school board are often elected positions. This means a board member's tenure is dependent on the constituents that elect him/her.

These elections can have a dramatic effect on the makeup of a school board. Glass, Björk and Brunner (2000) discovered that 9.5% of superintendents left their previous position due to the changes brought about by a school board election.

While superintendents often concentrate a good deal of effort on the relationships they have with their school board, another group that also plays a role in the success of the superintendents are the communities in which they work. Glass, Björk and Brunner (2000) found a very small percentage left the position due to lack of community support. The percentage citing community conflict as a reason for departure was 1.5% in the 2010 study (Kowalski, et al., 2011). Patillo (2008) also found a small percentage of superintendents in her study (4%) left the position because of conflict with members of the community. This difficulty often shows up as a lack of support by community members. Fullan (1998) believes that because of the complex nature of the position of superintendent, it is inevitable that there will always be a level of dissatisfaction in the community with the leader's performance. Williams (2007) found that community culture could influence the dismissal, non-renewal, or voluntary departure of a superintendent. Often this occurs when the community does not agree with a superintendent's vision for the school district.

The final reason men and women often give as leaving the position of superintendent is due to the superintendent's own unrealistic expectations of the position. As the position of superintendent has continued to change over time, so have the expectations in the position. Kowalski (2005) has explained that over time the position of superintendent has become increasingly more multifaceted, time intensive, and politically contentious. "Often persons in the superintendency believe that

expectations placed on them are listed precisely in their formal job descriptions...Many superintendents eventually discover that they also have invisible job descriptions that contain real rather than espoused expectations” (p. 50).

This conflict in expectation can begin from the hiring of the superintendent by a school board. Cochren (1994) found that often a board will ask “Does the board want a superintendent that actually provides leadership for the organization or do they want a superintendent that serves to implement the board’s agenda?” (p. 4). A superintendent may choose to leave if she feels she is not operating in the position she thought she was hired for. Czaja and Harman (1997) found that when both men and women superintendents in their study left, over 13 percent took a role in another school district, but not in the position of superintendent. Even a greater percentage (14.2%) took a job outside the field of education altogether.

Glass, Björk and Brunner (2000) found that “family considerations” was also a reason that a significant percentage of superintendents left the position (8.3%). When analyzing these numbers further, 8.4% of male respondents gave family considerations as the reason for leaving as opposed to only 7.9% of women.

Research has shown that superintendents leave rural positions more often than other types of districts (Kamrath & Brunner, 2008; Kowalski, 2003; Ramirez & Guzman, 1999). Grady and Bryant (1988) conducted a study of why rural superintendents leave the position. The study found that over 41 percent left the position for personal reasons. The reasons mentioned included stress on the family, consideration of the educational needs of the superintendent’s children, and effect on superintendent’s marriage.

Why women leave the superintendency

This review attempts to identify research that uncovers the impact of gender on access and retention of women in the superintendency (Chase, 1995; Chase & Bell, 1990; Grogan, 2000b, Brunner, 2000; Skrla et al., 2000). The more specific focus of this section is to identify the reasons that women give for why they leave the position of superintendent.

There are three ways that a woman can leave the position of superintendent. She may leave voluntarily, where she could have remained in the position, but opted not to stay. She may leave either voluntarily or under pressure, but was also offered or negotiated a buyout of her contract. Finally, a superintendent may be fired from her position. These methods of leaving are relatively consistent across the research (Allen, 1996; Beekley, 1994; Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Tallerico, Poole, & Burstyn, 1994; VanTuyle, 2008).

Similar to their male counterparts, many women leave their positions of superintendent to move on to another superintendency (Allen, 1996; Tallerico, Burstyn, & Poole, 1993; Tallerico, Poole, & Burstyn, 1994; VanTuyle, 2008). Based on the data from the 2003 AASA National Survey of U.S. Women Superintendents and Central Office Administrators, 38 percent of women made the move to a larger district (Brunner, Grogan & Prince, 2003). This move is always perceived as a positive one since a larger district often means more pay and professional challenges (VanTuyle, 2008). Tallerico, Burstyn, and Poole (1993) categorize this move as a “pull” which allows the woman superintendent an opportunity to assume greater responsibilities.

Challenges with the school board prove to be another reason that women leave the position of superintendent (Tallerico, Burstyn, & Poole, 1993). Beekley (1999) identified that women superintendents often experienced challenges working with school boards, especially ones primarily made up by men. In some cases, the women felt that the challenges they experienced were attacks due to their gender. Tallerico and Burstyn (1996) found that one of the greatest clashes between the two parties that often caused the superintendent to exit is when there are moral or ethical conflicts between the superintendent and the members of the school board that she serves. Brunner and Grogan (2007) identified the two main school board related causes for women leaving the superintendency: thirteen percent of women cited school board elections and ten percent cited school board conflict. The research of McKay and Grady (1994) discovered it was not necessarily the school board itself that caused the conflict, but when the board felt the need to micromanage the superintendent. These actions drove the superintendent to feel she could no longer be an effective leader.

When women do not feel successful in the position of superintendent, they often look inside themselves to determine why they are unhappy in the position. A number of studies identify that the position of superintendent takes them away from their original focus, a desire to provide strong instructional leadership that will benefit all students (Allen, 1996; Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996; Tallerico, Burstyn & Poole, 1993). In order to return to the focus on curriculum and instruction, many of the exiting female superintendents take other positions in PK-12 besides superintendent.

Chase (1995) found that the language used by departing women school superintendents emphasized her role in moving to the new position. "She asserts that

she did not leave the superintendency because of a difficult condition she faced at work but because she *chose* to do so as a result of her own shifting desire” (p. 106).

One move from the superintendency can be into a central office level position. Tallerico, Burstyn and Poole (1993) found that in many cases a move to a central office position was from smaller district superintendency to a larger, higher status district, which would allow a narrower job focus with a better salary. Allen (1996) agreed that the move to a central office position would allow a former superintendent to allow for more focus on curriculum and instruction as well as a freedom and flexibility in her schedule that was not available as superintendent.

Another PK-12 job choice for a departing female superintendent appears to be in the position of building principal. Allen (1996) found that the women in her study that moved into a principalship had a desire to reestablish a direct connection to the children. By moving back into a position of school-based leadership, these women no longer felt removed from day to day interactions with students. Tallerico, Burstyn and Poole (1993) interviewed two exiting female superintendents that chose to specifically return to an elementary principalship. When questioned about this choice, the women explained that after experiencing both positions, they realized they were better suited to serve in the position of principal. In moving back into an elementary building the women felt “‘like going home’ to contexts where their achievements had long been supported and welcomed” (p. 7).

Not all exits found former female superintendents returning to a position in PK-12. Allen (1996) found that other life trajectories included university teaching, serving as an educational consultant, or returning to finish the PhD started before the

superintendency. The largest post-superintendent group was those that had a desire to move into higher education. Out of the entire group interviewed, 30 percent of the women in her study left the superintendency to move into teaching educational administration courses at the university level. The pull of moving into higher education allowed these women “the opportunity to impact the profession by training future administrators” (p. 48).

While a great deal of the reasons for leaving are attributed to the internal challenges within the position, a number of researchers have also concluded that the external barriers of family responsibilities contribute to both deterring women into ascending to the superintendency as well as a reason for why they depart (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Grogan, 2000a; Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Tallerico & Tingley, 2001). These studies reinforce the argument that throughout the literature on women on the superintendency the family responsibilities versus work responsibilities continue to be perceived as a challenge.

Chase (1995) found that leaving for family presents a particular challenge. Women who choose to leave because of family have dealt with internal struggles – what is my priority? While she will often “assert that she did not leave the superintendency because of a difficult condition she faced at work but because she chose to do so as a result of her own shifting desire” (p. 106). At the same time, women continue to struggle after the choice because they are afraid they are letting other women down by exiting the position. Dana and Bourisaw (2006) suggest that while the traditional cultural expectation of woman as primary family caregiver has weakened, the expectation has not completely disappeared.

Children present a particular challenge in the context of the family. In the 2000 AASA survey of the superintendency, 32 percent of female superintendents raised children under the age of 15 while serving in the position (Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000). In a study of women administrators in Washington State, Derrington and Sharratt (2009) found that women with children in grades K-8 were rarely in the position of superintendent. In fact, the study found that women with children ages 1-19 were the smallest percentage of superintendents, versus women with grown children or no children.

Grogan (1999) found that many of the women in her study explained that they only considered the superintendency once they were towards the end of their family responsibilities. Many times this means that women in the position are many times past the age of child bearing and child rearing (Harris, Lowery & Arnold, 2002). A study conducted by Lowery and Harris (2000) on being a woman and a superintendent found their participants received explicit advice about child rearing and their careers. They explained that women providing them with career advice shared that they should not think about pursuing the position until an aspiring superintendent's children have left elementary school. One respondent in a study by Harris, Lowery and Arnold (2002) explained "I suffer Mommy guilt."

The relationship with her spouse also weighs heavily on a woman's decision to enter or leave the position of superintendent. Most often, this can be seen through the challenge of a woman's immobility to move due to her husband (Ramsey, 1997). Historically, a number of studies echo decisions made on the beliefs of a traditional family structure: that a husband's employment is considered more important than his

wife's and that a family should not move for a wife's career, even if it is a higher-status (Ezrati, 1983; Gerstel & Gross, 1982). Watkins, Herrin, and McDonald (1998) explain:

Few women have the luxury of relocating in order to attain job advancement. Ninety percent of women reported they would relocate only if their husbands secured employment. Seventy-five percent of men would relocate for a better job with or without the spouse's employment. In fact, our society discourages family change for the sake of a wife's career (p. 22).

This demonstrates that fewer women follow a nontraditional setup in their personal lives in order to experience career advancement (Chase & Bell, 1994). If a married woman does move to assume the position of superintendent, she is many times living a commuter marriage (Harris, Lowery & Arnold, 2002) or the husband is retired or has a career that allows his mobility (Ramsey, 1997). Brunner and Grogan (2007) found that 20 percent of the women superintendents surveyed in 2003 lived a commuter marriage.

Because of the stress of living in this non-traditional way, divorce is often another unfortunate byproduct for a woman superintendent. The pressure of being superwoman at both work and home often has an effect on the female superintendent's personal life usually demonstrated in higher divorce rates for this group (Funk, Pankake, & Schroth, 2002; Grogan & Brunner, 2005b; Gupton & Appelt-Slick, 1996). Brunner and Grogan (2005a) found that thirteen percent of the women superintendents participating in the 2003 survey were currently divorced. One participant's response on the open-ended section of the survey explains that her divorce was caused by the husband's lack of support towards her career. The New York State Council of School Superintendents

Snapshot 2009 found that female superintendents in New York State were more likely to be divorced than their male counterparts, 12.4 percent compared to five percent. In another state study, Olsen (2006) conducted research comparing the male and female superintendents in Iowa. She found that fifty-two percent of the female superintendent respondents were divorced versus eight percent of the male superintendents surveyed. Olsen continues by explaining this divorce rate is thirty percent higher than the overall report rate for women in the state of Iowa.

Brunner (1999) found that women explain with sadness that when given the choice of family or career, some women felt they had to “let go” of their husband in order to remain a successful superintendent. Most often, this was due to the fact that the husbands were having difficulty supporting their wives as they operated in a traditionally masculine and time consuming career. Divorce can have detrimental effects outside of the superintendent’s home as well. Lane-Washington and Wilson-Jones (2010) explained that one participant’s school board felt that a divorced female superintendent would be a poor role model for the district she was leading. Ironically, this woman would probably be an even greater asset to the division, since she would no longer need to worry about the balance and could focus solely on the work.

The final theme presented in the literature explains the female superintendent’s desire to exit “the fishbowl” that goes along with her position. Mercer (1996) explains that it is often customary for the leader of an organization, male or female, often to feel some level of isolation from others on staff. In addition, Kinsella (2004) explains that school systems expect the leader of that organization to model behaviors based on the beliefs of that system. This often means leading a relatively quiet, conservative

existence in the position and that members of the community will be watching for those beliefs to be demonstrated.

Watching the women of an organization, however, often means something quite different. Women in positions throughout the field of education have always been “in the fishbowl.” Blase and Pajak (1986) found that teachers in all types of settings (urban, suburban, and rural) reported that their lives outside the school building were monitored. The community’s constant watching robbed these women of their privacy and anonymity once they left the school and attempted to live their lives. Not surprisingly, the goal of “keeping an eye” on the female superintendent proves even more important in that it is the most powerful position in a school district. Gilmour and Kinsella (2008) explain one way this happens is with a school board demanding the superintendent live within the school district’s geographic boundaries. Within these boundaries Allgood (2005) conducted a study of female superintendents in Georgia. All participants shared feelings of being watched in public, some felt it more than others. While it could relate to what the female superintendent was wearing, or was she drinking alcohol, all study participants felt that they were constantly being scrutinized. In fact, all recognized “they had to think carefully and consciously when acting or making decisions in public simply because of the positions that they held” (p. 106).

This constant feeling of being watched can have a detrimental effect on what a superintendent does during her “time off.” Jones (1994) found that female leaders often avoid common everyday experiences – shopping, dining out, and socializing in public – for the fear of encountering members of the community that may want to talk or question her about the school system. Especially in a small school system, community

members often feel no hesitation towards approaching the superintendent outside the work setting. Amedy (1999) found that women superintendents are never off the clock. “One thing that bogs me down is a lot of times people who have concerns will want to talk directly to me. They want to circumvent everyone and come straight to me” (p. 38). These behaviors can contribute to the superintendent wanting to escape her surroundings and ultimately becoming isolated from the community around her.

Conclusion

Blount (1998) believes that the system of public education in the United States is a direct reflection of the society as a whole. With that being said, there is still a great deal of stratification in women in education. According to Brunner and Grogan (2007) women make up over seventy-five percent of all teachers, fifty percent of all elementary principals, but still only 21.7 percent of all superintendents. With this wide disproportion at the top, it is imperative that research continue to explore why women choose to abandon the position, especially after it was such a long and challenging road to get into the position to begin with.

Chapter 3: Methodology

According to the work of Michael Crotty (1998), a researcher must ask herself two questions before beginning her study: (1) What methodology will best be used to carry out the study?; and (2) How does the researcher justify this particular methodology? This study addressed the issue of women superintendents and why they leave. I was interested in going beyond the numbers and percentages of women leaving the position. I wanted to move beyond statistics to understanding (Von Wright, 1971). My goal was to delve into the insights of the participants through developing an understanding of their stories while exploring the complexity of the issue.

Rationale for Qualitative Inquiry

Why was a qualitative research study the best way to address the research questions that I posed? For me, this was best answered by investigating both the purpose of qualitative research in general as well as the importance of using qualitative methods when studying women. “The design of a qualitative study begins before the researcher chooses a qualitative approach. It begins by the researcher stating the problem or issue leading to the study, formulating the central purpose of the study, and providing the research questions” (Creswell, 2007, p.101). In essence, a qualitative study begins with the interest in understanding the who, what, when, where, why and how of experiences. Patton (2002) elaborates by explaining that qualitative research permits a researcher to “discover, capture, present, and preserve stories of organizations, programs, individuals, communities, and families” (p. 206).

Additionally, the goal of the researcher calls on being able to distinguish and describe each participant’s point of view and experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Flick

(2002) also emphasizes the difference between quantitative and qualitative by explaining that while quantitative research is interested in isolating specifics, qualitative research is more interested in the rich descriptions that are generated. It is these thick, rich descriptions which tell the stories and allow for a deeper understanding of each participant's experience (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). "Qualitative methods, particularly interviewing and observation, are those that can accommodate and explicate multiple, conflicting, and often inherently unaggregatable realities" (Lincoln, 1985, p. 143). The role of the researcher in a qualitative study is a personal one. Cole and Knowles (2001) explain "the researcher self is visible in the research text and the researcher is every bit as vulnerable, as present, as those who participate in the research" (p. 14). It was my job as the researcher to take these stories and experiences of the participants and bring sense to them on the page.

Feminist researchers emphasize that using a qualitative method, which provides a less formulaic method of researching, is imperative to discover women participants' feelings and beliefs. Skrla, Reyes and Scheurich (2000) identified the scarcity of compassionate research methods used to record the voices of women's experiences.

(W)e sought to research these women's experiences in a participatory way that might move us beyond an entirely researcher-constructed view of what was going on in our participants' lives, that is, to include the women's own analyses of their experiences and, perhaps most important, explore their own proposed solutions (Lincoln, 1993) for the problem of the silence surrounding their inequitable treatment (p. 46).

In 1985, Biklen and Shakeshaft challenged researchers to provide more scholarship in the areas of women administrators' lived experiences. While the number of studies from a woman's perspective *has* increased, 20 years after Biklen and Shakeshaft's charge, Brown and Irby (2005) found that not only does the majority of research on women in educational administration continue to be conducted in unpublished dissertation research, but the total percentage of studies specifically addressing women in educational administration between 1985-2005 is less than nine percent. Furthermore, Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan and Ballenger (2007) reinforced an earlier argument that qualitative, feminist research is often trivialized or viewed as a threat to the stakeholders of the status quo, because it challenges basic assumptions through alternative paradigms (Christman, 2003). Smulyan (2000) presents another reason for the importance of the female voice: "Detailed cases allow us to hear individual voices, relate them to our own experiences, and see how they reflect larger social patterns and issues. Especially in a male-dominated field, such as educational leadership, cases can provide insights that support, inform, and challenge theories of administration" (p. 44).

Theoretical Perspective

This study will employ a phenomenological approach. Kvale (1996) shares a definition of the approach:

Phenomenology is interested in elucidating both that which appears and the manner in which it appears. It studies the subjects' perspectives on their world; attempts to describe in detail the content and structure of the subjects' consciousness, to grasp the

qualitative diversity of their experiences and to explicate their essential meanings (p. 53).

Phenomenology is often a preferred mode of inquiry when researching the experiences of women. This particularly feminist approach to inquiry was chosen to provide the researcher an opportunity to listen to individual women's experiences in order to create a collective, shared description of the phenomena which includes what was experienced as well as how it was experienced (Moustakas, 1994). van Manen (1997) explains:

Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences. Phenomenology asks 'what is this or that kind of experience like?' it does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can explain and/or control the world, but rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world (p. 9).

Phenomenological inquiry can take two distinct forms. For the purpose of this study, I chose to use hermeneutical phenomenology. van Manen (1997) explains researchers employ hermeneutical phenomenology when the researcher not only comes to the topic because of a strong interest in the subject, but also serves as an interpreter and mediator throughout the study in order to make meaning of the experiences of the participants. By following this methodology, I am able to more deeply explore the participants' experiences because of my theoretical and personal knowledge on the topic of women in educational administration.

Moustakas (1994) speaks of intentionality or consciousness and how this is the starting point in phenomenology and how the process begins:

As we search into experience, we focus our seeing, our listening, our touching, our thinking on what that experience is in its essences. We examine how it is that experience is what it is, under what conditions it appears, from what frames of reference, and what its possible meanings are. To be able to deal with questions of love, beauty, anger, suspicion, jealousy, joy, and the like, we first bracket these concerns, shutting out our preconceived biases and judgments, setting aside voices, sounds, and silences that so readily tell us what something is. We describe in detail and fully the whole account of an issue, problem, situation, or experience, using qualities and properties from specific contexts or perspectives, so that the events or experiences take on vivid and essential meanings, a clear portrait of what is. We then reflect on these textural portraits to arrive at their essences, in terms of underlying conditions, precipitating factors, structural determinants. We combine the textural and structural meanings to arrive at the essences of an experience (p. 60).

Participant Selection

In determining participant selection for this study, a combination of purposeful sampling methods was utilized. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) define purposeful sampling as selecting “individuals who are likely to be knowledgeable and informative

about the phenomenon of interest” (p. 475). A combination of criterion-oriented sampling and reputational or “snowball” sampling were used. Criterion-oriented sampling deliberately selects participants because of their abilities to provide information that only they can because of their lived experience in that position (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 1998, Patton, 1990). The reputational method or “snowball” sampling (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006) allows for a study participant to use her already existing social network to provide additional research participants for the study.

In this study, the purposeful sampling began with criterion-oriented sampling. When determining a criterion-oriented sample, a researcher must not only identify a list of specific criteria to identify the study participants, but she must also rationalize why these are the necessary criteria (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Merriam, 1998).

The criterion-oriented identifiers for this study are:

- Participant is a female;
- Participant held position of superintendent in the Commonwealth of Virginia;
- Participant served as a superintendent between 1985 and 2011; and
- Participant served as a superintendent and left (either left the position entirely or moved to another superintendency)

When I began this study, I wouldn’t have believed that one of the most challenging aspects of this process would be the struggle to actually identify who were the female superintendents in Virginia who had left. I logically started my search by contacting two different organizations in Virginia, the Virginia Association of School Superintendents (VASS) and the Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA). I introduced myself as a doctoral student and shared that I would be doing a dissertation

on the topic of women superintendents in Virginia and why they leave. I asked each organization for a listing of all of the superintendents in all of the divisions over time. I explained that I would be more than happy to search their list to find the names of the women I would be interested in contacting. I was told by both organizations that there was no such list. I was shocked to find out that both of these powerful groups kept no historical listing of the people they served.

I was telling this story of there being no historical list to one of my professors, JoLynne DeMary. Before she came to work at VCU, Dr. DeMary was the previous state superintendent of Virginia. As I was sharing my frustration, she told me, "Of course there is a listing, Kerry. You just don't know the right person to ask." She told me that she would contact someone at the Virginia Department of Education to get the list for me.

Two days later, I get an email with the subject line: *You Were Right!* Dr. DeMary explained that she found out the Virginia Department of Education currently only keeps the listing of superintendents for five years because that is the length of time that is required by records retention guidelines. When she had asked about the Virginia Department of Education directories that were printed every year that contained all of the information by school division, she was told those were eliminated due to budget cuts.

A this point I tried to use the internet to see if there were any lists of Virginia superintendents floating around the World Wide Web. After only finding three years worth, I decided to search school division websites. I searched each of the 136 school division websites to see what information I could find there. Most often the only thing the

division's website told me was information about the current superintendent. I really was unsure how I would be able to get any more information short of calling all 136 school divisions in Virginia to ask them for a historical listing of their superintendents. I was fearful that by doing it this way, I would speak to someone who may not have that information available or who would not have the institutional knowledge to provide me the information I was looking for.

So I was stuck. I wasn't sure where to turn next. Then I thought: *Where have I gone anytime throughout my entire life when I needed a question answered?* The answer is the library. The next day, I went to the Library of Virginia to see if there was a resource there that could help me with my search. I explained my dilemma to one of the research librarians and, of course, she knew how to solve my problem. She told me about the *Virginia Review Directory of State and Local Government Officials*. This annual directory is an alphabetical listing by city/county by position. I spent the next couple weeks going over to the Library of Virginia to work my way through the 22 volumes that made up 1990-2011.

Using a combination of the *Virginia Review Directory of State and Local Government Officials*, Virginia Department of Education records, and individual school division websites, I created a database of all of the female superintendents who served in the Commonwealth of Virginia from 1990 through 2012. In cases when a name did not allow for me to determine whether or not the superintendent was a man or a woman, an internet search or phone inquiry to the specific school division was made to make the necessary determination.

Members of Women Educational Leaders in Virginia (WELV) helped to refine the database further. The goal of this organization is “to support women in all areas of education and to promote and increase the participation of women in higher levels of educational leadership” (WELV, 2010). The members of the organization, many of them former and current superintendents, provided me with additional information – any names that may have been omitted, tenure of superintendency, whether any women on the list were deceased, and in some cases, current contact information.

From this database, I identified a population. This database included the names of 49 women who have served in the position of superintendent of schools between 1985 and 2011 and then exited that particular superintendency. In order to find contact information for this identified group, I had assistance from members of WELV as well as using a people search and background check website (www.peoplesmart.com) to locate mailing addresses, phone numbers, and/or email addresses of potential study participants. From the 49 possible participants, I was able to find contact information for 34 of them. Based on the type of contact information I had for each woman, I either made contact through US Mail (Appendix A), an email from my Virginia Commonwealth University account (Appendix B), or by telephone using a script (Appendix C).

From this initial contact, I heard back from 16 women. Of the group I had contacted, 15 had agreed to participate, and one had chosen not to participate. Even though this woman chose not to participate, she wanted to contact me anyway to explain while she didn’t feel comfortable revisiting this period of her life, she wished me the best of luck. My conclusion was that this one non-participant, in addition to the

numbers of women that I did not hear back from, made me think that telling the particulars of why she left the superintendency may be too difficult to relive.

Once I had started the interviewing process, some participants contacted other women superintendents they had worked with and suggested they participate in my study. These were women that I had contacted from my original list but had never received an initial response. Because of the “snowballing” that occurred after my initial request, my eventual sample reached 20 women, or approximately 60% of the women who could be found.

From this group, I did a quick analysis of my participants. I wanted to make sure that the women participating in my study created a sample that was “substantively representative of the population it claims to represent and that would provide the characteristics that would seem theoretically relevant” (Conrad, Haworth, & Miller, 1993, p. 268). These women served in school divisions of varying sizes, with the classifications of rural, urban, and suburban divisions. While my group of women was predominantly Caucasian (18) instead of African American (2), this sample reflects the reality that the percentage of African American superintendents in Virginia is significantly less than their Caucasian counterparts. Currently, the total percentage of female superintendents in Virginia is approximately 30 percent. The number of African-American superintendents is approximately 17 percent. It is important to note that the percentage of African American female superintendents has increased over the last decade. Finally, the superintendents were categorized by the way they left the position. These departures included:

- Women who left the superintendency for another position in PK-12 (7)

- Women who left the position to go into higher education (4)
- Women who left the position to go to a position outside of PK-12 or higher education (e.g. educational consulting) (1)
- Women who retired (4)
- Women who left for another superintendency (4)

Additional information about each of the study participants, like years in education, years in the superintendency, etc. can be found in Table 1.

While I could have made additional attempts to find more participants for this study once I had completed my interviews, I kept my participants at this number based on the research of Creswell (2007), who stated that five to 25 participants would be sufficient in conducting a phenomenological study.

Human Participants and Ethical Considerations

Once I had my sample of 20 participants, I contacted each of the women personally to arrange an interview schedule. While we worked on a day and time that was beneficial for both interviewer and participant, the one area that I insisted the participant take the lead was in the location of the interview. I wanted to ensure that each woman would feel most comfortable sharing her story “because of the sensitive nature and probing of individual circumstances, contexts, and perspectives” (Tallerico, Burstyn, & Poole, 1993, p. 3). This meant that I conducted interviews in restaurants, work sites, offices, as well as women’s homes. To meet the needs of the participants, this meant during the course of the interviewing phase, I covered five states and approximately 6,200 total miles to listen to the stories of these women.

Table 1

Overview of Superintendent Participants

Superintendent Pseudonym	Race Ethnicity	Division Type	Size of Division	Years as Superintendent	Total Years in Education
Diane Fager	Caucasian	Rural	1,200	5	--
Diane Fager	Caucasian	Suburban	5,000	8	--
Diane Fager	Caucasian	Urban	2,200	5 (18 total)	30
Rebecca Glutz	Caucasian	Rural	2,700	9	33
Frances Barrett	Caucasian	Rural	1,600	3	-
Frances Barrett	Caucasian	Suburban	16,000	4	--
Frances Barrett	Caucasian	Suburban	5,000	12** (19 total, still in position)	37** (still in position)
Lisa Ingalls	Caucasian	Rural	2,500	3	38
Karen Dudich	Caucasian	Rural	3,000	3	--
Karen Dudich	Caucasian	Suburban	2,000	1 ¼ (4 ¼ total)	33
Harriet Klein	Caucasian	Rural	4,000	3	--
Harriet Klein	Caucasian	Suburban	12,000	7 (10 total)	25
Violet Zelle	Caucasian	Rural	1,700	7	31
Alice Tavormina	Caucasian	Rural	1,800	9	38
Gwen Shirley	Caucasian	Rural	14,000	6	40
Pamela Brody	African American	Urban	23,000	4	--
Pamela Brody	African American	Urban	56,000	4 (8 total)	45
Tracey Leibson	Caucasian	Urban	3,000	2	30
Betty Stevens	Caucasian	Rural	< 1,000	3	30

June Canter	Caucasian	Rural	< 1,000	2	20
Nancy Wilder	Caucasian	Suburban	< 1,000	16	37
Eileen Pollak	Caucasian	Suburban	27,000	4	38
Catherine March	Caucasian	Rural	4,500	7	--
Catherine March	Caucasian	Suburban	12,000	3 (10 total)	30
Wendi Gumenik	Caucasian	Rural	4,500	5	20
Melissa Snowe	Caucasian	Rural	2,500	6	--
Melissa Snowe	Caucasian	Suburban	4,000	2	--
Melissa Snowe	Caucasian	Rural	6,000	6 (14 total)	36
Sofia Talford	Caucasian	Suburban	2,000	4 $\frac{3}{4}$	--
Sofia Talford	Caucasian	Rural	< 1,000	1 $\frac{1}{2}$	--
Sofia Talford	Caucasian	Rural	1,500	7* (13 total, still in position)	33* (still in position)
Olivia Manfre	African American	Urban	14,000	4	37

Before the interviews began, I had every participant sign a consent form containing Virginia Commonwealth University's Institutional Review Board's (IRB) required information (Appendix D). Once permission was obtained through signature, the potential participant became an active participant in the research study and the interviewing and data collection began.

While there is a possible sensitive nature to the topic of women leaving the position of superintendent, this research did not involve greater than minimal risk. Since there are fewer women superintendents in Virginia compared to men as a whole, and even fewer that have exited the position, it was imperative to make sure the women could not be identified. Due to the political nature of the position, names of people and places have been changed to keep all information confidential. Pseudonyms were used for all participants. In order to protect participant privacy, only the participant and I were present for the interview. Even though the study and participation were discussed ahead of time and a signed consent was obtained from every participant, I started each interview reminding each participant that she could choose not to answer any question that caused discomfort. Participants also had the opportunity to ask questions at any time throughout the process.

One limitation to a qualitative study is the perspective that a researcher brings to the position. As the interviewer, I was the meaning maker and I needed to identify how I might get in the way and what I could do to avoid that. While Denzin (1989) states that "value-free interpretive research is impossible" (p. 23), I conducted this study as a hermeneutical phenomenology because of my strong interest in the subject, while serving as a mediator throughout the study in order to make meaning of the

experiences of the participants. While mediating the study, I attempted not to impose my values, beliefs or biases onto the women participating in the study in order to not unknowingly influence the interview data (Patton, 1990). The areas I identified that might “get in the way” and therefore needed to be monitored were:

- I share the same gender as the study participants;
- I have observed a number of these superintendent exits during my tenure in PK-12 administration; and
- I need to be aware of my preconceived notions based on my review of literature, which are detailed in the section, “Researcher Perspective”

While working in PK-12 administrative settings in a school division in Virginia, I was often very interested in watching the career paths of a number of the female superintendents that were in divisions throughout the state. My anecdotal evidence was that many of the women who exited the superintendency did not reappear in another superintendent position in another location. In contrast, many of the male superintendents would leave one superintendency, only to reappear in a second (or third, or fourth) superintendency. I was curious to know what the literature said about what I was observing, but what I really wanted to hear were the stories behind these women’s departures.

At the same time, my perceptions on the subject of women in the superintendency have been shaped by my personal experiences as well as the reviews of literature I have done on the topic of women in educational administration in general. I believe it is unrealistic to think that I would choose a topic that I have no interest in or awareness of. As Hesse-Biber (2007) explains “As a feminist interviewer, I am aware of the nature of my relationship to those whom I interview, careful to understand my

particular personal and research standpoints and what role I play in the interview process in terms of my power and authority over the interview situation” (pp. 113-114).

While I never forgot my connection to my study because of interest and personal experience, I kept Moustakas’ (1994) description of Epoche as the guide for how I began my study:

As I reflect on the nature and meaning of the Epoche, I see it as a preparation for deriving new knowledge but also as an experience in itself, a process of setting aside predilections, prejudices, predispositions, and allowing things, events, and people to enter anew into consciousness and to look and see them again, as if for the first time (p. 85).

Data Collection

For my data collection, I chose to interview participants. The purpose of my choice to interview is best described by Patton (2002):

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe... We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective (pp. 340-341).

The data collection followed interview protocols that Kvale & Brinkmann (2008) refer to as semi-structured life world interviewing. The emphasis on this type of interviewing is to provide the participant the opportunity to share aspects of her life.

This kind of interview seeks to obtain descriptions of the interviewees' lived world with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena. It comes close to everyday conversation, but as a professional interview it has a purpose and involves a specific approach and technique" (p. 27).

This in-depth interview process allows participants to reconstruct their experiences (Seidman, 2006). Rubin and Rubin (2005) explain that "[t]hrough qualitative interviews you can understand experiences and reconstruct events in which you did not participate" (p. 3).

Ultimately, according to Seidman (2006), "The truly effective question flows from an interviewer's concentrated listening, engaged interest in what is being said, and purpose in moving forward" (p. 93). Skrla (2000) found a way to make her participants feel more comfortable by conducting qualitative research that she viewed as an 'empowering research methodology'

that was intended to get women who had been superintendents to feel free and safe enough in a research interview setting to talk openly about their lives in this male-dominated role. A key feature of this empowering methodology was my deliberate attempt to conduct interviews in a way that I felt was closer to conversing with

colleagues than to traditional interviews in which an 'expert' researcher questioned research 'subjects' (p. 614).

Interviewing offers researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher. This asset is particularly important for the study of women in order to provide a voice of this often silenced group. These voices, as Reinharz (1992) explains, "is an antidote to centuries of ignoring women's ideas altogether or having men speak for women (p. 19). Hesse-Biber (2007) provides an even more critical lens to the qualitative interview. "As a feminist interviewer, I am interested in getting at the subjugated knowledge of the diversity of women's realities that often lie hidden and unarticulated. I am asking questions and exploring issues that are of particular concern to women's lives" (p. 113). Each interview began with me asking the woman "tell me the story of how you got to the position of superintendent." From there, I let the women take the lead on the direction of the interview. My interview protocol did not contain specific questions, but instead themes and topics I wished to explore. A copy of the interview theme protocol can be found in Appendix E. Based on how each woman shared her story, I engaged her with follow-ups or probing questions (Brunner, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The 20 participants were interviewed between June 2011 and May 2012. One woman participated through a phone interview. The other 19 woman participated with face-to-face interviews. The interview lengths ranged from 75 minutes to almost five hours. The average interview lasted two hours and 30 minutes. The utilization of such lengthy interviews allowed for the collection of rich data.

Each interview was recorded by two digital recorders to ensure the recording of responses of the study participants. In some cases, I made brief notes on my interview guide while the interview was going on. I purposely did not take extensive notes during the dialogue because I did not want to have my jotting down information be a distraction from the flow of the conversation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). I did spend time after each interview, however, writing memos and field notes in anticipation of the analysis of the interview transcripts.

In order to prepare for the qualitative analysis, I transcribed each of the interviews verbatim by reviewing the recordings. After each transcript was completed, I also reviewed any of my written memos and field notes from that particular interview as well as any additional materials provided to be by the participant (i.e. resumes, speeches, newspaper articles). Any materials that were collected during or after the interviews were viewed as data and were analyzed along with interview transcripts.

Data Analysis

Once an interview was conducted, the process of transcribing and analyzing the interview began. I attempted to transcribe and analyze while I was still conducting interviews. This helped me identify coding categories earlier in the process as well as allowed me to use what was learned to prepare for the next interview (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

My overall data analysis plan was guided by the framework proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) for qualitative analysis: (1) data reduction, which involves selecting, focusing, condensing and transforming data; (2) data display, which involves creating an organized, compressed way of arranging coded data that are connected in

some way; and (3) conclusion drawing and verification, which involves revisiting the data many times to verify, test, or confirm identified themes and patterns.

One challenge in the method was to attempt to make sense of the 800 plus pages of interview transcripts and field notes. When I looked at this unwieldy amount of paper in front of me, I knew I was looking at raw data that was “unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming with the sheer volume of materials that needed to be processed” (Merriam, 1998, p. 162). In order to make sense of all of the stories and notes I had in front of me, I needed to find a systematic way to analyze what was there. “Analysis entails classifying, comparing, weighing, and combining material from the interviews to extract the meaning and implications, to reveal patterns, or to stitch together descriptions of events into a coherent narrative” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 201).

The two-step process of reduction began with the reading and re-reading of all the transcripts and notes several times in order to identify concepts, themes, and events in the data. The second step was to code the interviews so that participants’ quotes could be utilized as examples of the concepts, themes, and events (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I color coded my data and began categorizing these codes into themes. For example, all data that was identified as pertaining to family was coded green. This allowed me to have a basic means of categorizing as I went through each interview. As I assigned codes to the concepts, themes and events within the interviews, I made sure that the definitions that I had established were employed consistently throughout.

Once all of the interviews had been color coded, I reviewed my codes for overlap and redundancy and reduced my number of codes further. At this point, I collapsed my codes into larger themes and further developed a visual display of the relationship

between each of my codes. The data display I created provided an organizing tool for me to better understand my overarching concepts. From this display, the following themes emerged of why women leave the superintendency:

- It's not the job she thought it would be
- The struggles with family
- Taking care of herself
- I'm not the right fit for the community

A visual representation of my themes and subthemes can be found in Appendix F. It is important to note that there is overlap in these themes. The women that participated in the study explained that there was always more than one reason for leaving the position, even if one reason proved to be stronger than the others. Findings for each of these themes will be presented in Chapter 4.

Summary

This chapter identified the importance of carrying out the study using a qualitative methodology and to employ phenomenology as my theoretical framework.

Phenomenology is rooted in questions that give a direction and focus to meaning, and in themes that sustain an inquiry, awaken further interest and concern, and account for our passionate involvement with whatever is being experienced. In a phenomenological investigation the researcher has a personal interest in whatever she or he seeks to know; the researcher is intimately connected with the phenomenon. The puzzlement is autobiographical, making memory and history essential dimensions

of discovery, in the present and extensions into the future”

(Moustakas, 1994, p. 59).

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the reasons that women report as factors that contribute to their decision to leave their superintendency. Whether the women leave to pursue another superintendency or leave the position, it was important to hear the stories behind the reasons they chose to leave.

Finding 1: It's Not the Job I Thought It Would Be

The reporter had interviewed me when I got the job and the article explained that here is somebody coming to us, she has stuck with her school division, she doesn't move around. This is a good thing for our schools. She has this long, strong instructional background. She has been a teacher for a long, long time. She knows Virginia and she thinks that we're a great community. All these glowing things...That was a nice shot in the arm and it was kind of an endorsement of all of the hard work I had done when I arrived to be prepared.

The diminished role of instruction.

One of the areas often discussed was the importance of instruction and how the women believed this was a key role in the job they would be doing in the superintendency.

Fighting for instructional leadership.

All of the women interviewed explained that they went into the superintendency to make a difference for students. While quite a number of the participants "reluctantly" or "accidentally" went into administration in the first place, they only chose to continue

the trip up the ladder because they believed they could make a difference for students.

One woman explained her decision to enter the position:

If you believe that the principal is the instructional leader of the building, then I am the instructional leader of the division. I fought the daily demands of my schedule to try to start my day in classrooms. I made sure I knew what was going on from my youngest students right up to the high school seniors.

Making time to focus on instruction.

In the role of superintendent, the women had a great deal of control over the instructional programs that were put in place. One woman explained her interest in providing the best educational opportunities for her students in a small school division:

I made sure we had Governor's School options. We did the International Baccalaureate program. As far as instruction goes, in a small school district, you have to constantly look at ways you can provide options for your children. Sometimes, in small districts, they just throw their hands up and say, "Well, we're so small, we can't do anything else." Well, that's not true. That's why I was always looking for something else...Obviously, I hit the gifted end. But I also worked hard to develop programs for special needs kids and CTE [Career and Technical Education].

In fact, these women were quite proud of the instructional initiatives that were created during their tenures and remained even after they had left the position. These programs

provided educational opportunities for students and best practices for teachers. One woman explained the changes she implemented as soon as she entered the position:

When I came in, there weren't curriculum guides, there wasn't a way people knew how to analyze their data, and there wasn't a set of protocols or practice tests and [our county] we're very much in the mountains and it's hard for our teachers to get out of the mountains to go do professional development so I tried my best to try and get resources at their fingertips and knowledge at their fingertips and to use the internet as much as possible to get things that they could use and rely on.

The initiatives the women started included: alternative education opportunities for students, Reading Recovery, online instruction, using data to make instructional decisions, curriculum mapping, introduction/expansion of Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs, and personnel evaluations tied to classroom instruction. These programs were focused on improving the curriculum for all students. One superintendent explained how these changes had an effect on her schools and the division as well, "Because of all of these instructional initiatives, we made the jump to the next level of (state) accreditation and making AYP."

Not able to jump back in to instruction.

Many times, in order for these instructional initiatives to take place, the superintendent felt she needed to roll up her sleeves and take a large role in the implementation. One woman explained how she implemented a new program in one of her schools:

I wanted people to know I was part of the process. I was there for the meetings. I had the department chairs of every content area sitting at the table. I was there to send the message that this new curriculum was aligned and it would be taught and tested. I wanted them to know I knew about the program and what would be expected. If there were going to be issues, I expected the school-level administrators to get in there and help. I told everyone at that table that we should all be involved in the instruction that is going on in our schools.

For all the women, at some point there was a realization that the position of superintendent could not focus on instruction as much as they had hoped. This was a sad realization to the women who thought that they were going to have opportunities to put what they had learned over the years into practice on a macro level:

Look at my career path. It has every position where I was so focused on instruction. By the time I got to that superintendency I'm thinking, *OK, this is the where I can shape instruction and I can make real big PK-12 decisions*. Then once I got in there, the first thing you wind up saying is, "Wait a minute. Where are the instructional decisions that I thought I would be doing daily?"

Unfortunately, my instructional expertise was not valued once I was in the superintendent role. Instructional knowledge may have gotten me the position, but my job now is anything but instructional decision making.

It's not that instruction wasn't going on in the school divisions, the women were just being told by their school boards that someone else would have to be focusing on it; that the job of superintendent worried about much bigger issues than instruction.

For a number of the women who took a winding path to the superintendency, achieving the position at an older age proved to work as an advantage. These women were able to hold true to their focus better than other women. Gwen Shirley shared her confidence in entering the job:

I was 55 and had 30 years when I started the position, so from the beginning it was a funny relationship. Funny is not the right word, but anyway it's an odd relationship between school board and the superintendent. They are your boss. They do hire you; they pay your salary; they give you direction, but in almost all instances they are not professional educators so they don't know what's best instructionally and what's best for students. So it was handy to have 55 and 30 and say, "I appreciate your input and I have looked at it but we're going to go in a different way." It probably gave me a lot more backbone than I might have had if I had to be concerned about keeping the job.

Leaving for Instruction.

While no women in the study left solely for the reason of not being as involved in instruction, it did prove to be a major source of disappointment and often occurred in the stories the women shared. As the women sat in meeting after meeting dealing with topics such as zoning, budgeting, construction, and appropriations, most reported they

couldn't help think, "Is this really what I signed up for?" Some of the women started to question whether or not they wanted to remain so far removed from instruction. When one woman's contract renewal came up, she explained to the board that she would be leaving at the end of her term:

Not only was I exhausted from trying to do it all, I also realized it [my job] wasn't fun anymore. I had spent my career in positions that were fun. I didn't want to do a job where I wasn't having fun. So, I left the superintendency to go back to a position where I could have fun.

A second woman who did not have her contract renewed by her school board, but who still had five more years before she could retire, had to make a decision about the job she would take after this superintendency. "I went back to the position I really liked, assistant superintendent. This allowed me to do what I thought I was going to get to do as the superintendent, focus on instruction.

Even if the woman didn't go "back" into a previous position (principal, assistant superintendent), some women took the opportunity to move into instruction in a new field:

I always wanted to work at the college level. A few people had approached me while I was superintendent. I didn't have time to do it then. But I could do it once I left my superintendency. Now that I am in that position, I get a charge of excitement as I start my day! Everything is new!

The role of politics.

When the topic of “politics” was brought up by the women, I was amazed how many different types of situations that superintendents attributed to politics. All of the participants shared how important it was to be “politically savvy” in order to experience success in the position. The important thing, the women explained, was knowing how exactly to be savvy based on the group the woman was interacting with.

Politics in the community.

One challenge that some of the women of this study experiences was when a politician lived in their county or city. This politician could be a delegate or a senator, often a state-level elected position. These politicians should have had very little to do with the superintendents, but in fact, they often played a very significant role in the superintendent’s stories. In some cases, this was a woman learning the hard way about the political nature of the position:

One of the school division employees was also serving in an elected position. When I came to the job and met with him, he said, "Of course, I don't take any leave because I need it for my reelection campaigns." My comment was, "Just be careful that when you're taking leave that it's for a bona fide reason so that the school would not be accused of subsidizing a politician." Well, he went from that meeting with me straight to the former superintendent who went to the city manager. The city manager sent one of his underlings to say, "Either leave the politician alone or you're not getting a dime in your budget." So that was in the first

month. That was my first month as the superintendency...Then the follow-up on this little piece of knowing about politics occurred the next year when the school board gave me my evaluation. The board never talked to me, they didn't set goals with me, nothing, but it was in my evaluation to be more sensitive to the political aspects of the school division staff members and I thought, *this is in my evaluation?*

Another woman refused to let the political members of the community affect what choices she was going to make:

... and then there was the issue of the mayor. Gwinn had been there forever and then Marino took over. As a person, Marino was a pretty decent guy. But he's like most mayors, he wants to run the schools. Hey, I'm the superintendent; I'm not going to let you run the school system. We can work together, but I'm not going to let you run the system.

The politics of the position.

The other thing that I've seen affects so many folks is not understanding the politics of the job. You've got to go into these things with your eyes wide open and don't be afraid to ask for help. It's just like we tell our teachers, "Don't go in the room and close the door." When you get to the superintendency, a lot of people are afraid to say "I need help." I've seen folks go down the tube because of that. One person in particular so many of us tried to

offer assistance. We saw what was happening to her. We all went in and helped her, not just females but males as well, just fellow superintendents. If you need help, reach out for it, because everybody wants you to be successful. Your board doesn't want to see you fail, your community, your colleagues. Sometimes folks just close the door and keep going down the wrong path. Eventually you are down the road with two years and then they let you go because it hasn't worked.

By keeping oblivious to the importance of the politics, a superintendent is doomed to fail. There was often an epiphany for many of the women about how political the position was. In order to make it in the position, the women understood the need to be politically astute at all times. "I never knew who was listening to what I was saying, or worse, I never knew who was reporting everything I said to someone else. It seems like the former superintendent always knew what I was doing."

A number of women found out just how powerful the "former superintendent" could be. In a number of cases, members of the community, school board members, and even city council members would relay information to the former superintendent for his input. In all these cases, the "former superintendent" was a male. This proved to be an additional hoop the women would often have to jump through, even though it should never have been the primary focus to being with. Another woman, Sofia, echoed that the focus on the politics was a challenge for both male and female superintendents, and the reason why so many lose their jobs:

So, if you talk to any superintendent, male or female, the politics in our job is the number one factor, I think, that would make people leave the superintendency. I think another thing is job security. Like in my former superintendency, I made a million decisions that the board loved and one decision that one board member, the most powerful one, didn't like, and it almost ruined my career. Is that fair? I used to think, as I would lie in bed at night, but I realized then just how powerful the politics in the position could be.

The difficulty that many of these women experience is when they realize that they are making the decisions based on what is right for children, but that might not be what the board is interested in doing:

I think we make the mistake by catering so much to the ideas and the wants of the school board and politicians that we give up our own knowledge and experience for the sake of keeping the job. We go against what we should be doing for kids just to keep the political powers happy.

Unfortunately, it was only upon reflection that some women realized just how important the politics played in their ability to do the job:

As I step back and look I realize I learned so much and I would ask if I had it to do again, would I do things differently? Absolutely there are some things I would do differently. Knowing about the underlying powerbrokers, would I compromise my integrity for what's right and wrong? No. But would I realize there's different

ways to work with different types of people that I hadn't had experience with before? Absolutely. And realizing that people aren't always going to come onboard to what you say and that's okay. But keep focused on what it is you know about yourself, what it is you believe that we need to do to move forward and listen to the voices of others.

Playing politics in the workplace.

There were a number of examples of how the women had to deal with the politics of the work place. The stories often differed depending on whether or not the woman was promoted from inside the system or if she had come from the outside to achieve the position of superintendent. In both situations, the women said they had to deal with how co-workers dealt with them

Women who had been promoted from the inside often dealt with the politics of familiarity. These women were often approached by a former teaching colleague asking them to remember when they worked together "in the trenches." Other examples included emails from former colleagues wanting the inside scoop as a favor. There were situations where the women commented on how the relationships with former colleagues would run hot and cold. One woman gave an example of how the relationship changed as she moved up the ladder:

Well, immediately after you get into administration, even as an assistant principal in the same school where you've always been when you open the door and their eyes meet you and you're an administrator it's like some people freeze. Some people just view

you as their critic rather than their support person and I guess my feelings were hurt by that by large. It's strange because in some instances we've always have had a great relationship and of course the further you advance the more sensitive that gets to be until you're a superintendent. Then everyone wants you to remember how close you were teaching in the trenches.

The women who moved into the superintendency from outside the division often experienced a very different level of politics. In many cases, members of her new staff would be people who had also applied for the superintendency and not gotten the job. For these superintendents, establishing a bond with her staff helped with the hard feelings that were often present.

Then I had to monitor a lot of other people. But then again when you go in as superintendent in a county where there were like four people that were in the central office and they all wanted that job really bad and they didn't get it. Well you are the new person coming in and there can be some sabotage stuff going on. It's just office politics I guess, which I always find so annoying because I always feel that everybody should be working for the common good. I'm idealistic ... I'm an idealistic person.

In some other cases, some women found a situation of "keep your friends close and your enemies closer" because some members of a superintendent's staff might try to undermine what she was doing, hoping to get the job if the board dismissed the superintendent. Karen explained that from the moment she was appointed "from the

outside” she knew there were people in the school division that worked behind the scenes to undermine what she was doing:

Some people on my cabinet thought they were helping me by letting me know who I beat out to get the superintendency. I could tell within three days who was there to work with me and who was there to try and take my job. Apparently, it must have worked because as soon as I left, Frank got the superintendency. He spent my entire 2 ½ year tenure digging my grave so he could shove me in it first chance he got.

The power of the Board of Supervisors or City Council.

A good number of stories addressed the precarious relationship between the superintendent and the Board of Supervisors (for a school district that was in a county) or City Council (for a school division that was in a city). I was particularly interested in these stories because I hadn’t seen them presented in many of the other studies on why women leave the superintendency. One reason may be because of the way that funding to schools occurs in Virginia.

Understanding Virginia’s system.

In most states, funding to schools is very straightforward. In addition to federal and state funds that are received, a school system receives local funding through a set percentage from property taxes. The only way to get additional local funds for schools is an increase in property taxes or a bond.

Virginia does not operate using this model. There is an additional layer to receiving the local funds. It is the job of the Board of Supervisors/City Council to

determine the amount of money that the schools will receive each year. Not only does a superintendent make a budget proposal to her school board, that proposal must also be sent upward for consideration. It is then up to the Board of Supervisors/City Council to determine how much money the school division will receive. The women explained that this made the job of politicking with the purse holders extremely important.

The money part of it was awful. In Virginia, the money part of it is awful. I mean school boards are required by the Constitution of Virginia. Board of Supervisors and city supervisors or whoever they are, are a convenience. But, the way the structure is established in Virginia, even though the school board is constitutional, they have no financial power. They have to get their money through the supervisors and through the county government. So, you can see the governmental structure and the legal structure is set up for conflict.

As Tracey explained, dealing with the Board of Supervisors became paramount for her division to receive any money. "Each month, I would have to go to the Board of Supervisors meetings and plead for every dollar under every category." Often times in many of these smaller, rural communities the same Board of Supervisors had been operating with such power for so long, a new appointed superintendent caused turmoil in the way things were normally done:

My Board of Supervisors were used to making backroom deals.

They told me the first time they met me, "This is what you are going to get." I said, "Excuse me? Could you repeat that?" They repeated,

“This is what you are going to get. So you won’t be getting raises.” I said, “We haven’t been through the budget process yet. You don’t even know what we’re asking for yet.” They said, “Well this is the way we’ve always done it and it works. Why would we want to do it any differently?”

Other women had to make regular visits to the Board of Supervisors meetings to request, or beg, for funding. June explained that her visit to the Board of Supervisors became a county event with hundreds of citizens attending the meeting:

The meeting started and the Board of Supervisors said to me, “Dr. Canter please stand, we’ve got a question about the finances.” I had a pack of information with me. They said, “We are very concerned because the maintenance category is extremely high. We are being sensitive to taxpayer money and we just cannot appropriate these dollars until we have the whole political story.” As I stood answering their questions I realized that I could not let anybody bully these kids. I could not let anybody bully these teachers and bully these community members. If I needed to be the one to stand up and put an end to it then I was going to do it because I owed that to them. I looked at them and said, “Is that all?” They said, “Yes.” This event did not endear me to the already troubled relationship I had with the Board of Supervisors and County Administrator, right?

June couldn't believe that if the Board of Supervisors had simply asked her about the amount ahead of time, they wouldn't had to have had the spectacle of political grandstanding. It was a simple item that could be explained in not such a stressful circumstance.

Learning from other's mistakes.

One of the benefits of having such a long and varied career before they entered the superintendency was the women's ability to watch people before them serve in the position of superintendent and learn from what they had observed during other superintendent's tenures. In some cases, women explained that they didn't want to make the same mistakes others had done:

While I was working in Sebastian County a new superintendent came in. It was a man who had never been superintendent before...I watched him get in trouble. Not with his own board, but with the board of supervisors. He played such politics and was secretive with them in things that made no sense, except he enjoyed the needling. I don't know, I couldn't see the purpose. And through watching him fall into such disfavor with the supervisors, and they were the ones in that county that appointed the members of the school board. One by one as it was time for the position to come up for reappointment, the supervisors all put their own people on the school board. It got to the point that anything that he had recommended, and you know that nothing goes past the board unless the superintendent recommends it first. So, no matter how

hard I had worked on something or something that the teachers had worked on that as soon as he said, “I recommend,” the school board would say no. This was the first time I thought, “Man, I could do better than this.” But it also taught me how important it was to pay attention to the political nature of this position.

Conflicts with the School Board.

A superintendent is the only person in a school division who is evaluated by non professionals. Everyone else is evaluated by someone who is professionally trained to do that, but not the superintendent. Don’t do this job if you don’t have a thick skin. I mean if you get your feelings hurt easily, it’s not the place to be because you are going to get your feelings hurt. There are going to be conflicts with the school board without a doubt.

As with many other studies on people leaving the superintendency, the school board often plays a role in a woman’s decision to depart the position. There were subtleties in the stories that made me divide this section into subheadings to emphasize the various issues dealing specifically with the school board. These areas included: (a) appointed versus elected boards; (b) board elections; (c) the role of the board – the board’s view; and (d) the challenge with women board members.

Appointed versus elected boards.

A number of women shared stories of how their superintendency changed when the type of school board changed. The change from an appointed board to an elected

board made for some different dynamics. Gwen explained how her relationship with the board had changed once the type of board changed:

We had gone from very paternalistic in the best sense of the word since it was an appointed board with just five members. During my first year as superintendent, it went to an elected board and nobody was paternalistic any more. Nobody wanted to do what's best for kids. They were people who had run for election on platforms and positions and they were planning to run again in another four years and so they were always much more conscious, not that we all weren't conscious of the community and its input, but it got to be much more at least in my mind, a special interest segment and so that put a whole different parameter.

Nancy also found that there was a distinct change in the way a school board operated when they went from being appointed to elected. They often came in to the position for a very specific purpose:

I came on with an appointed board, but it switched over to an elected school board while I was in the position. It changed soon after I was there. So things were totally different once the boards were elected. As time evolved, some people definitely came to running for the school board with their own agenda. Usually it had to do with something that occurred in the division regarding personnel. A person running is supposed to be interested in the good of the division, but in many cases, it was someone who had

an axe to grind about something that had happened with a hiring or a firing.

Board elections.

The elected boards also proved often to be problematic when elections rolled around. Often, the board that hired the superintendent would not remain intact during the tenure of the superintendent. The honeymoon period can quickly end depending on the election cycle:

Right after I became superintendent, there was an election. I became superintendent in October and the election was in November. The board changed by three members. Any time a board changes, I don't care how good the superintendent is, the new board members feel their charge is to get rid of the current superintendent. So you have that to begin with and that happened with me. The first board and I had like a honeymoon relationship and then three of my 'supporters' got ousted and replaced by three that had no loyalty or allegiance to me. So from that point on it was difficult.

Any change in the board make up can cause a challenge to the superintendent, but it proves to be especially difficult when the direction of the board shifts as well:

It became very difficult. The board that hired me slowly but surely moved on. After two years, there was a change in the board, with a couple of members. And then of course after another two years...even though school boards are not supposed to be partisan,

they are. You can't say they're not. They are an elected school board, and they were supported by the parties. On the board during that second election, there were two additional people who were brought on the board by that Republican conservative branch. At that point, that left my board pretty strong with three strong Republican members and they wanted a fourth vote. As soon as they got that, I knew I was in trouble.

That shift in power can prove to be one of the major considerations that causes a superintendent to leave. Frances took this turnover as an opportunity to move to another superintendency:

So that made me think...The board had always been on a four to three split the whole time I had been there. We got a lot done but even three people in the minority can take up a lot of your time, chasing down every rumor, every innuendo and you spend a lot of time solving what I call, manufactured crises. And I was spending a good deal of my time on that. And in the 1999 election, the balance changed from four to three to three to four. I still had three years left on my contract, but – it affected my job satisfaction, spending time on manufactured crises and that type of thing, although I really, really liked working there, I knew I didn't want to deal with that challenge.

As another woman who left because of her school board, Catherine shared some advice for sitting (or aspiring) superintendents regarding how to deal with a changing board:

I would give advice to say look at your board and know the election cycle. If you get hired and then are slated to get a whole new board – leave! You need to go because the board that hires is the one who likes you. They picked you. The next board that comes on wants to make a mark for themselves. You were not their selection but the selection of the previous board. You are forever associated with the first. You will never be loved by the second or third board as much as you were loved by the board that chose you for the job.

The role of the board – The board's view.

According to a number of the women, the most frustrating part of not focusing on instruction was when the superintendent needed to devote a disproportionate amount of time focused on the needs and “whims” of their school boards. One woman shared:

Even after I've left the position, I've continued to watch superintendents. I can now say without a doubt, the superintendent's main job is to serve the board. They don't serve the children or the community or anything, they serve the board...I think we superintendents make the mistake because we cater so much to the ideas and the wants of the elected politicians that we give up our own knowledge and experience and go for the sake of

keeping a job, keeping the politics going, and it's not always the best thing.

Even when the women tried to address the needs of the school board, many felt they were constantly fighting a losing battle. The availability of certain board members made getting the job done a particular challenge:

All five of my school board members were people who pretty much had control of their own time. None of them was retired, but they all had jobs where they could come at you any time of the day or night and of course no matter how good your secretary or assistant is, when a school board member calls or drops by, you see them.

That's respect for the position that they expect...They just seemed to have an inordinate amount of time. I was fortunate to only have five members. I know some people have seven or nine and they all want your attention...It wouldn't matter what I had scheduled for that day. I would say, "I'm supposed to be observing in this classroom" and the next thing you know, my secretary was told to call the school and tell them I can't be there, but she can't tell them why...You know, if it was about really significant issues that couldn't be discussed at some other time, that's one thing, but usually that's not what it was. Usually it's something that could wait or they could have come back later that evening while I was still working, but that was never considered. They wanted to discuss it when it's on their mind because they've got to get back to

somebody else who felt it was a pressing issue. Kerry, you've worked in administration long enough to know it is almost never a pressing issue.

The women explained that every board member has a constituency to answer to and they all have their own personal areas of interest. This often meant additional time meeting with board members individually to hear concerns which may or may not be personally motivated:

Of course all of the school board members were very anxious to talk with me and each one did that separately and we needed that time because I needed to listen to what their specific concerns were. And there was one, for example, she was very concerned about gifted programs and she needed to be heard. I didn't always agree with her, but she made sure that she was heard on that topic.

Many times when a new superintendent is hired, there are specific jobs that the school board asks the new superintendent to carry out. In quite a few stories I heard, this meant getting rid of certain personnel on staff. In some situations this proved to be a challenge for the superintendent for the wrong reasons:

When I got the job the board had made it very clear, there were two teachers, two math teachers, and the board wanted them gone. Well, the board was exactly right. Remember, it's a small community so the board members' children had previously had these teachers, and they kept hearing these horror stories about how ineffective these two people were and they were right. Well,

we had done all of our documentation and I had said to the principals and the assistant principals, I want classroom observations, I want evaluations first semester, I want all the appropriate paperwork. And you know we had all the paperwork. So, when I brought them everything that was needed to dismiss them, the board said to me, “Dr. Glutz, do you think we should give them another chance?” I looked at my new board and said, “Excuse me?! You told me when you interviewed me that you wanted these two people gone and you were completely right! Now you want to give them another chance?” I was furious. I was completely furious. I thought, *this better not be how our relationship goes or I won’t be here very long.*

Dr. Glutz stuck to her recommendation and she did get rid of the teachers, but it gave her insight to how the board felt they were going to be able to overrule her decisions. It was stories like these that truly expressed the frustration that many of the women felt.

For the women who would fight to try and keep instruction the top priority, the school board always had a way of reminding them what was most important to them. One particularly tech-savvy superintendent thought she had solved the issue of keeping the board happy:

Focus on the board. If you want to stay, you focus on the board. Let your staff do instruction, if you have a staff, I only had five people. You do need to focus on the board, be in constant contact with them. When I was there, one of the first things I wanted to do was a

podcast that would give them a summary of the day. The school board chair called the podcast “cute” but ultimately said “No, we like more personal contact.” That meant that I could spend a whole day trying to make contact, because if you contact one, you've got to contact them all. Otherwise, they start playing this game of, “The superintendent told me, she didn't tell me that, why's she calling you?” I could spend all day on the phone just trying to contact them all. So much for trying to save time to focus on instruction...I should've been more forceful with that, but I would say to keep your job that the name of the game is at this point, pay attention to the board. Keep them on your side.

No matter what hoops a superintendent jumps through, sometimes she can't keep the board on her side. When a superintendent realizes that there is a disconnect between what she is supposed to be doing and what she is actually doing, this is often a time that a woman decides to leave the position:

So I went in the meeting knowing and as we were walking down the hall I said to my board chair, “What's the vote so far?” He said, “It is still five to two.” I knew I didn't have the votes, but I wasn't going to let them decide my fate. I wanted to keep the power. So I walked into executive session and said, “Before we get going on any other discussion let me just say something. You know a school board should have a superintendent they feel they can best work with and the superintendent should have the school board she feels she can

work best with. That's the way it was when I was hired and that's why we did great things. We built schools. We did things that people didn't think would ever happen. Those things have been done because of a collaborative effort and I don't get that collaborative sense anymore. I think it's time for me to leave."

The women explained that it is challenging to be in conflict with the school board, but it is a more serious issue when the relationship with the board becomes one of micromanagement. Micromanagement was the reason three women left their positions. As Diane shared, her relationship with the board moved past the traditional give and take when her board chair decided to take management to a new level:

I don't want to paint a picture that everything was perfect. I mean I had one real jerk on the board. He was a lawyer who was always so pompous. But at any rate, he was the one that really began to get on my nerves. I could see that he thought I had too much power and too much control. Well, I should. I knew this business so well and I've been doing this a long time. When he really started to question every single thing I was doing, I thought, *it's probably time for me to quit*. This is the perfect time for me to leave because I had planned to retire in this community and I didn't want to spoil anything. I thought I'll leave while everything is on top. The jerk can micromanage the next superintendent.

As Pamela explained, micromanagement became much more prevalent when the finances of the school division were involved:

Unlike the rest of my time in Marsala, we had gotten a particularly contentious board, a divisive board, and they felt the need to bark orders at me. The chair wanted to go in directions that I did not want to go. He totally wanted to adopt the business model. He was an attorney and was convinced that everything needed to be looked at through the lens of how much it would cost. He wanted to check in with me daily to see how I was saving money. I said, "I don't need to show this. I don't need to do this anymore." Since I had already been toying with the decision to retire, I did.

For Melissa, the micromanagement issue was particularly upsetting since it was the board that hired her that now decided they wanted to control all her decisions:

I told the board during that tenure, I said, "You hired me as superintendent. You guys need to be a board. Set your policies. Don't micromanage me." I have always been very up front. Now, a lot of folks are scared to say those things to their board members. I was just getting older and fed up with some of it, because that can cause friction. It's your job, and there are ways to let them know you're unhappy. As long as you're not insubordinate, they can't fire you. Or unless you do something wrong, some malfeasance. But you have to have a school board that works in tandem with you. This was no longer a group who wanted to work with me. Maybe they had planned on micromanaging me all along. I don't know...That was the start of me getting out of that superintendency.

The challenge with women board members.

The most disappointing thing I kept hearing throughout all of these stories is the number of times female board members became the biggest challenge to the superintendent's success and ultimately what often caused the woman to think about leaving the position. In four women's stories, it was a woman board member who led the micromanagement of the superintendent:

I had a woman who was the school board chair. This was a very difficult relationship because I felt that she wanted to run my life. She would come and even leave notes on the front door of my townhouse, like "Why haven't you called me?" Or "Where are you?" Or "You need to..." Of course, if it was on the weekend and I didn't have obligations to the school division, and if Frank [my husband] wasn't there, I would go home for the weekend or we'd go to the beach. This lady chair felt that I did not give her enough of my time and began to needle me at all times. I thought that a woman on the board would have been an ally – NOPE!

One particularly difficult story to hear was told by Lisa who already had a longstanding relationship with the school board chair. This chair had previously applied for the superintendency in the county a few years earlier and did not get the job. She chose to run for the school board after she was unsuccessful in her superintendency bid. When the job came open again and Lisa got the position, it made the relationship between the two women additionally challenging:

...when I was chosen as superintendent it was a split vote. And she [the board chair] had voted for another man so that sort of made I guess, our relationship sort of strained. And she was very public in saying that the other person was who she wanted. So while I served as the superintendent in the back of my mind I really didn't think I ever had her confidence. There were always little things coming up that she wanted to do differently. She started every conversation with, "I would have done it this way or I would have done it that way." So I felt like she living out her desire to be superintendent, as a board member.

This made it challenging for the women of the study to acknowledge that often their biggest challenge, detractor, or foe was another woman trying to micromanage the duties of the superintendent.

I know we both publically stated that we were doing what was best for kids, however, every move she made seemed to do nothing but prevent me from putting kids first...She felt I was her puppet and at her beck-and-call at all times. She knew my schedule. Any time I was scheduled to be in a school, she made a point to have me called back to the central office so that we could meet. I tried to get her to meet with me after the schools were dismissed for the day, but she let me know that she was the one setting the schedule for our meetings.

As Lisa found, the extra time she felt battling with her school board chair made the position even more challenging. It made her continuously question whether or not she should remain in the position:

So, you know it wasn't easy and then with the feeling you know that you're spending 16-17 hours a day busting your butt and you're doing everything you can and then having this woman sort of nitpick and say "I would have done it this way" or "Don't you think it would have been better if you'd done it this way?" It just sort of made me feel like that I could never please her to the fullest extent. So that did have some effect on my decision to retire. I thought, you know, it's really going to be hard for me to do, no matter how hard I work, to live up to what she thinks she would've done if she had gotten the position. I was tired of the fight.

The one story that showed the greatest conflict between the superintendent and female board chair occurred between Catherine and her chair. Catherine was convinced that Judith ran for the board solely to get her out of the job:

There was a real turnover on the board and I could have stood working with any of them, except Judith. She was once on City Council and she believed I had something to do with her getting voted out of that position. So she decided to run for School Board. You know Judith ran for just one reason. It was her vengeance to get rid of me. She was as mean as a snake and hated me. She even wouldn't speak to me. I mean here I am the superintendent

and she wouldn't speak to me when we were at functions together. She was going to do anything she could to destroy me. She would lie, she would steal, whatever; she was on the board to get rid of me, to destroy me. The only reason I stayed was because of that school. I was staying until I got that school built.

Unfortunately, even the draw of continuing to work for the children of the division was not enough to keep Catherine in the position. The fact that she had enough years to retire made walking away from this challenging relationship something Catherine felt she had to do:

I still love the school division I still love the people, I still love the kids. It's a great place. It really is and I would love to still be here, but she just ruined everything. She is just nasty. It was mainly her, everybody else really was workable. I mean they might not have liked me but mainly it was her poisoning everything constantly. One person could do it. She became a board chair through bullying. I mean she is an unbelievable bully. She was the most angry woman I have ever seen. Mean as a junkyard dog. I don't think I have ever met anybody that mean in my life...Had it been six years earlier I would have left the day she came on the board because I knew what was going to happen. I would not have tolerated her for the year I did. But I wanted that school to open and I knew she would have stopped it. She really wanted to stop that project because she saw it as my project and so I was not going to let that happen. Had

it been six years earlier and I hadn't been that close to my retirement I would have gone. The day she came on the board, that day, that minute, I would have left right then.

Finding 2: The Struggles with Family

A lot of times people forget that superintendents have lives outside of the district. For example, I have very elderly parents that live next door to me. Well, every morning I go over and make sure that they have everything they need for the day before I leave. I gave my mother her shot. I put my dad's compression socks on. These things all occur before 7am.

You know, we're people too and your staff and the community need to see that human side of you. People need to know that you're a wife, and you're a mom, and a daughter, and a superintendent. You run everything. At the end of my day, I go home and do laundry and I cook. I do all those things. I go to the grocery store and I babysit grandkids. I do all those things. Believe it or not, I'm not just the superintendent.

All of the participants in my study explained that the opportunities they had couldn't and wouldn't have happened without consulting their family first. Family played a large role in the women's decisions to both accept a position as well as leave a position. Numerous studies on women in administrative positions emphasize the necessity of having to juggle multiple roles in order to perceive success in the position.

Loder (2005) found that women's stress comes from the administrator's struggle of having to be an instructional leader, wife, mother, caretaker, and more.

For the women in this study, the superintendency meant a forced isolation from some or all aspects of family life. The study participants explained that decisions were never taken lightly within their family units, since in many ways it meant having to "give up" their family in order to gain the position. Sometimes that meant having to miss a child's soccer game, not spending Sunday at church services, and it often meant having to live separately. As I explore *family* as one of the reasons why women move or exit the superintendency, I will look at the roles that husbands, children, and parents play into these decisions.

Husbands.

Husbands played a large part of the stories of my study participants. All 20 of my participants have been married at least once. Eleven of the women are/were still married to their first husband at the time of their superintendency. Of the nine remaining superintendents, death of a spouse or divorce played a part in their story. There were a number of areas that were explored under the topic of husbands. These include: (a) death; (b) always out lifestyle; (c) commuter marriages; (d) divorce; (e) husband as a support or constraint; and (f) paying back my husband.

Death.

The death of a spouse is always a life changing event. In my study, two women shared examples of how the death of their first spouse shaped their stories. The first woman, Violet, experienced a "life-changing event" when he husband died in her kitchen.

I wasn't a superintendent when my husband died, but you know it changed the course of my life. It was transformational. At that point I decided I was going to go forth and try this whole superintendency search again.

Violet did get a superintendency after her husband's death, and she thought a great deal about what she had learned in relation to everything that had happened to her in that short amount of time:

I hate to say this, but the death of my husband really thickened my skin. I realized nothing that anyone can do to me, you can't hurt me. I'm sorry I have already experienced the worst thing I can experience. That whole event thickened my skin. No matter what happened to me after that, I always thought, *what's the worst that can happen?*

Pamela Brody's husband's death was tied directly to her leaving the position of superintendent. The change in plans had an impact on her future:

My husband, who was a bit older than I, decided that he was ready to retire, but he was on a calendar year contract...He had announced his plan to retire December 31st. So I would retire at the end of my three-year term which was the following June 30th. My husband unfortunately died on November 7th so he never got the chance to retire. I had already announced my plans to retire June 30th and so I said I will go ahead with it.

Pamela took the event of her husband passing away as the chance to move away from the home (and memories) she shared with her deceased husband and to start a new chapter of her life. She went on to other positions in education, including a second superintendency. Ironically, if her husband had lived to retire, this woman's additional career stops would have never occurred:

Oh, clearly if he had not passed away, I know I would have not gone to Metropolis or Capital City. We were retiring. We had plans to travel and do other fun things. I might have done some small things like consulting or writing, but I had no plans of doing a day-to-day job anymore. We had both earned our right to retire. We had started working so young, we were just looking forward to having the time to really enjoy one another and doing things we hadn't gotten to do while we were working. I started my first full-time job at 19, so when you turn 50 something, you are more than ready to stop working and retire.

Always out lifestyle.

The role of a superintendent is a demanding and busy one. There are commitments that keep a woman away from home starting early in the morning until often late in the evening. For many women superintendents' husbands, these long days and late nights were something they understood came along with the territory. As one woman explains the demands of the position:

I was out probably three nights a week. We had a lot of things that were going on there. I had a lot of night meetings; I had a lot of

committees, a lot of community committees, and review committees, and all this kind of stuff. I was out probably three times a week, sometimes four times a week. My husband used to say to me in the morning, "I'll see you when I see you."

This long-day, break-neck pace was not anything new once the woman had achieved the position of superintendent; in fact, this was often a practice that had been continuing for years.

I was always gone in the evenings. It wasn't just when I became superintendent. I did all of my coursework for my Master's and Doctorate at night. I used to have responsibilities at the school at night when I was an assistant principal or principal. I had to go to School Board meetings when I was an assistant superintendent. I was just used to being out at night.

A fifteen or sixteen hour day was more the norm than the exception for many of these women while they served as superintendent. Any deviation from this pattern was one they happily acknowledged (even if it didn't seem that way to their husbands):

I left at 6:00 in the morning and I got home at midnight, 1:00 o'clock, 2:00 o'clock. Sometimes the school board meeting would go till 2:00...I remember one night I got home from work and I hadn't eaten, so I got a bagel and I sat down in bed with the bagel and it was 10:00 o'clock and I said, "Oh god this is so great, it's an early night." He said, "Alice, you are sick, 10:00 o'clock at night is not an early night." But for me it was.

Always being out meant that most of the times the woman superintendent would be out with male colleagues. The conversation around public perception and husband jealousy were topics that were discussed. In most cases, the women explained that their husbands understood this to be part of the job. As one woman shared, the last thing she would ever call her husband was jealous:

He just knew anytime I was out, I was out with men. Very seldom was I out with even another woman, whether it was lunch, or dinner, or an overnight conference. In fact I went to New Orleans for a conference one time. I called him as soon as I arrived to the hotel so he would know I made it safely. The first thing he asked me was, "Have you been down to Bourbon Street yet?" I said, "Well, no. I understand it's not a place a woman is supposed to go alone." He said, "Well find some guy you know to take you." So I mean yeah truly – if I had to point to a single factor that allowed me to have the kind of career I have had, it would be my husband.

All of this time out made for extremely long days over a period of years. This particular schedule of always being out was mentioned as a major consideration in leaving the superintendency. The women hoped for days where they could fit normal events in with their spouse:

I think when I left the superintendency, we saw six movies in the theater in a month. I don't think I saw six movies during the entire tenure of my superintendency, and that includes watching them at

home on cable. It was nice that my husband and I would have the chance to just do things together when we wanted.

Commuter marriages.

Atrociously long days away from their spouse were still better than the alternative – women who had to live in a separate residence from their husband while serving in the superintendency. Eight women in this study lived apart while they were in the position of superintendent. Two of the eight women lived apart for multiple superintendencies. They saw it as a price they had to pay in order to get the position. As one woman explained:

At one time I was a finalist for four different superintendencies in three different states. I told my husband, I don't know where I'll be living, but it won't be here with you. That's the only thing for sure I know right now.

When a woman got a superintendency, often times her husband would not have the opportunity to move because of his own job constraints. Having multiple households was something that came to be expected with gaining the position. This meant that most of their time was spent apart:

By the second year, I had a house in Linville, a house in Plainfield, and we had a beach home. It was like, "Where am I going to be? Who's on first?" It was a crazy deal. It became tougher on the home front, because of our separation. For the eight years I was superintendent, we were separated at least four of them in fact, probably closer to five. I didn't want to be by myself any more.

If a woman didn't have the opportunity to live in her home while working in the new position, in some instances, this meant that her husband might do something to bring himself to the new location. In some cases, this was part of the family master plan, in other cases, it was not:

So the plan was he was going to teach three years and join me. But my sister called me once I was there, about three weeks, and she said, "Paul really misses you," and I said, "Well of course, we have never been apart since we've been married like 35 years." She said, "No, he really misses you. I think he is going to quit his job in December." I said, "He can't quit; it's not part of the plan." But he did quit in June. He quit a year early just to come and be with me.

Other husbands found new jobs that would allow for them to move to the new location with their wife. It many times did not occur until after the woman was in the position for a while:

My husband and I did live apart. Well just until our house sold and then he moved to Virginia. He got a job in Virginia because he was going to do sales. This meant he would travel all over but Virginia was part of his territory. He did move down a few months after I started, but then he was also on the road a lot because of the new job. So in some ways, we were still living apart.

All of the women used the same phrase when they were discussing the time that they lived apart from their husbands. They called it a commuter marriage. Not only were they wanting to talk about their own experiences with a commuter marriage, they were

quick to bring up the names and situations of other women superintendents in Virginia who had also done the same. Collectively, this group agreed that this phenomenon has a great effect on the length of tenure for the superintendent.

We lived a commuter marriage. He remained in the town where I had gotten my first administrative job. Yeah we had a date night every Wednesday night. We would always meet somewhere for dinner. We also were together every weekend. A lot of times that might mean he would have to come to me...We did whatever we had to do.

When spouses live apart so that they can each have a career, the time the couple spent together also revolved around the school division. These women spent months (and in some cases years) living a separate life from their husbands. Some of the women explained about their “weekend/holiday marriage.” Quite a few other women explained that their weekly “dates” with their spouse involved attending high school sporting events.

We did Friday night football. That was our Friday night date. In Mountainside our schools played one another a lot so I could almost hit all high schools on Friday night because they'd be playing each other so I'd go one quarter, one quarter, one quarter, and one quarter. So I saw everybody in the community in one night...That was just part of becoming part of the community, and when you're a superintendent you do that. You should do that. You should be there, just like the high school principal, they need to

know you're part of that community, and we were. Both of us were.

They saw us at the games, they saw us at basketball. They knew that we were part of that community.

These weekend “dates” were referenced by quite a few of the women as one way that they were able to make their relationships work. Having these dates out in public, however, meant that it was just another instance where the superintendent was “on” at all times:

People watch. A good example is Jim was with me down there one weekend, but this was before he came down there full-time. We'd apparently gone out grocery shopping or something and the community watches everything you do. Jim and I have already been married maybe 15 years when I made these moves. Even though it did become a little difficult at one point, we were still very much in love and a couple. My board chair, JR said, "Oh! So and so said they saw you and Jim over the weekend going through such and such parking lot. You were going to the grocery store, and you were holding hands. They thought that was so cute!" People watch you. My gosh! I probably not only held his hand, but I wouldn't be surprised if I didn't kiss him. Shocking! Somebody saw that and said something to a school board member. I'm surprised it didn't make it on the news that night!

While a number of women had lived a commuter marriage, there were ones who were quick to point out that this arrangement is not an ideal one for couples, especially young couples:

Now, that's not the way you can live as a young family and so I'm fully aware that the model I am talking about is not a model that can be copied by younger women. It is simply not. But, the women who came before me in the superintendency, either, they had no children, or their children were grown and their husbands were able to follow them to their superintendency, or they were divorced...I can tell you it's a different sort of life.

Young or old, living apart takes a toll on the woman superintendent. Living in a community by yourself only seemed to increase the workaholic nature of the women in this study. These women felt if there was no one to go home to, what was the rush to head to an empty house? As one woman shared:

I spent way more time at the office and I think part of the draw of hiring a person like me even as superintendent is that I didn't have a family to go home to. So I could stay until 8:00, 9:00 at night or 10:00. I didn't have a problem with meetings at night, I was 24/7. So you know, silly me.

Loneliness and not having anyone to talk to also contributed to the women wanting to get away from being in this situation by themselves. It caused many of the women to keep things bottled up inside since there was no one to share with:

I never told my kids. I never shared with my kids, and I think one of the hardest things is my husband wasn't there to let me vent and that became very difficult...So that made me really lonely. I was lonely to begin with, because I was in a place where I didn't have any friends. I only had working colleagues and associations. I knew that it was time to go.

The biggest metaphor for living the lonely life was one woman's description of the house she lived in as superintendent:

I bought a home within a month of my appointment. I never put any furniture in it. I had a bed in the bedroom. My sister came to visit, and said, "Oh my God, you don't even have a table." She brought me a table. It wasn't that I couldn't afford it. That was not it at all. I just couldn't get set. For a year, I lived in a house that when I was talking to people. It was too big, I'd walk around and it would echo, and they would say, "Are you in a tunnel?" There was no furniture in the house. That first year, there was so much going on with the job. I never bought furniture...It was almost like I knew I wasn't going to stay very long...When things really started going badly with the school board; I wanted my husband with me. My husband called. And he said, "Just come home. You don't have to work. Just come home." I left that superintendency and came home.

In fact, three other women shared the same exact phrase of their husbands telling them to "come home" for it to be the final prompt in leaving the position.

Divorce.

Similar to findings in *The American School Superintendent: 2010 Decennial Study*, the women in this study explained to me that they found divorce was much more common among their female counterparts than the male superintendents in Virginia. In some cases, the divorce was the impetus to them applying for a superintendency. One woman explained her divorce coincided with an opening close to where she grew up. She took it as a sign to make a change:

I saw an opening came up in Walker County. I had grown up in that area of Virginia and you know since I was from that general area I decided to apply for that position. I went down and did a couple of the interviews and got the job. So moved down there and it was a good time. I had been in Randolph County almost my whole career but with the divorce going on and everything else I think, I thought it was time for me to take a new look at things.

Another woman explained that her mother suggested that her newly divorced status would give her the opportunity to do what she hadn't been able to do up to that point, move for the job.

This was the first chance I had to decide on my own what I really wanted to do and to go where I really wanted to go. I think one of the hardest things is my husband kept telling me what I should do. And that became very difficult. I knew what I wanted to do, but he kept saying, "Well, you should do this, or you're not doing that," or whatever. I think his input was actually a hindrance because as

soon as I was on my own, I had my first superintendency three months later! Of course, if you ask my ex-husband, I'm sure he'd say he had a great deal to do with my career, but no he didn't.

In contrast, more often, a divorce was the byproduct of the aspirations of the woman. One woman explained that marriage didn't seem to be as important as the other things she was doing:

It's been hard. I've been divorced more than once. In that first marriage in particular when I was going to the university and I was working full-time. I was in the doctoral program and I was working as an assistant superintendent which is still very demanding. In order to do my job and to complete everything, well you know how it is, I felt like I had to completely give up my social life. It was hard and I wound up getting divorced because of it.

Another superintendent explained that she had thought about divorce a number of times, but for many reasons, continued to talk herself out of it:

I had actually planned several times to file for divorce, but to be blunt with you, I would have had to pay him support and I thought I couldn't handle that...The one real thing it did to our relationship was it caused me to ultimately lose a great deal of respect for him because I am a very, and was a very, ambitious person. It was just unbelievable to me when I saw that he really did not intend to pursue anything else. I couldn't have spent my life like that. So we lived very separate lives while I was superintendent...I guess the

other thing I thought about as I moved here to Virginia was I don't know if it would have mattered to this board in Newcastle if I came alone and was divorced. I don't know, that's something I have always wondered, always puzzled about that. So, he came here with me when I got the job, but we divorced soon after.

Finally, one woman explained that it was the job of the superintendent itself that caused her divorce:

So I was single for a good number of years, but while I was in Brooks County I married a gentleman who lives here in this community. He was retired military. That marriage didn't survive my job. We're still best of friends now and he has been my number one caregiver over these past couple years as I have been ill, but no, our marriage didn't survive the superintendency.

As Harriet went on to explain, the job was just too much for her husband to deal with. He could not handle being an afterthought. She always put the needs of her school division first and that was difficult for her new husband to understand.

I was never home. I guess he expected me to be at home waiting for him with a home-cooked meal when he got off of work. This was not my life. I don't know if he thought I would become that once I was married to him, but that wasn't me. I ate, slept and breathed my school system. My then husband couldn't ever understand that. Maybe I shouldn't have married him while I was a superintendent. Maybe the marriage would have survived.

Husband as support or constraint.

While there were a number of stories about the difficulty of divorce, and how that may have played into the decision to leave, there were just as many stories sharing how supportive a husband a superintendent's husband could be. When I first heard the women mention how supportive their husbands were, before they provided details, I was skeptical. Were the husbands really being supportive or were they simply not interfering in what their wives wanted to do? As I listened to the stories of the women talk about "supportive husbands" I tried to determine what the women's definition of support really is.

Some women were quick to share that they had a supportive husband. When I asked Pamela to provide an example she shared:

My husband used to drive when we were going places so I had time to review things while we were riding in the car. While we would be heading away for a long weekend, I knew I had time in the car but also could squeeze in some work while I was away.

There were quite a number of times where he would say, "What are you bringing all of this stuff for?" He didn't complain too much because we were actually going away.

Wendi's example she shared with me also proved to be not so much a support as it was a husband who didn't challenge his wife's plans:

I have always been really lucky. My husband has always sort of let me do what I wanted to do. I mean I did all my graduate work at night while I was a teacher. So he has always been very supportive

of whatever I wanted to do. So that was key, I mean if you don't have a supportive spouse no need to even try it. He was busy with the family business so he was ok with my superintendency.

Wendi explains that she found her husband to be supportive, but when she says "he let me do what I wanted to do," it only demonstrated her husband was simply giving permission, not really support. As I spoke with Violet about the level of support a husband could provide, she joked that she didn't think it was in a man's DNA to know how to really provide the support that would be needed. In fact, she took her example a step further:

...but most male superintendents have wives that stay home. They don't have careers. I think there is something to be said for that. I know when I was superintendent there were many times I wished I had a stay-at-home wife. Now some females do have a spouse that is retired and he can help keep the home fires because as a superintendent you don't have time to focus on the home fires.

Other examples I heard from the participants, however, really did share stories where the husbands did a variety of different things to maintain things while their wives worked at this powerful job. One key trait of a supportive husband was the flexibility he would provide in moving to the location where his wife got a superintendency. Frances shares that her husband's willingness to relocate allowed her to do what many other women superintendents don't get the chance to do, move into multiple superintendencies:

And I guess this is actually key to my story - it's the story of my mobility that some women don't have. When I was finishing my doctorate, my husband knew I wanted to become a principal and he had said to me, "Well we moved to a new state for me and you know my job is pretty easy to get." I mean, it's not that he's immodest, but he was very good and he was willing to be flexible. He was willing to get a job anywhere in his field in order for me to move and that's the key to my mobility. If you are limited by your spouse's willingness or ability to relocate that's one thing that works against superintendents. And he made it very clear from the start that he was willing to get a job anywhere.

Eileen also talks about her husband's willingness and ability to move to a location that would work for both of them. In fact, she shares her husband is often the primary researcher to determine the location of where they will move:

That's just the commitment we made to one another. So we made no decision for me to go one place or another without us both being able to support living where we were living and having the kind of house we wanted and doing what we needed to do. That was very interesting. He was always supportive. Of course you would expect your husband to support you, but he was always honest... I've never made any decision about where I was going without him researching the area to determine whether or not it was a place that he wanted to go...When I got the call to apply for Nettie County, I

had him research that area. That was something that he wanted to do was find a place where we could live and have what we wanted to do. After we make that decision, I'm still working and he is researching and buying the house. Essentially, that's what happens. He actually had power of attorney to close on the house in Nettie County before I ever saw it. He does it all and I move in.

The challenge in analyzing the women's stories is once again deconstructing what "support" really means. If these stories were told by male superintendents, would we be hearing that the wives were supportive because they were willing to move? This was another example of maybe not support, but instead not being a constraint.

Many of the women shared that they would not have been able to achieve the superintendency unless they had support from their husband throughout their entire career path, which included time at universities to earn additional degrees and certifications. Karen shares how instrumental her husband was during that process:

Throughout it all I had my husband and my family. They were always supportive of me working and going wherever I wanted to make my dreams come true. My husband was and still is my rock. He never complained about the hours I worked. When I got my doctorate, if I had to be away for my job which I did quite a bit, he would go to class and take notes for me so I wouldn't miss out on what happened in my classes. When I was going to school at night, if the roads were bad he would insist on driving me to school. He would sit in the lounge and work on his work stuff while I went to

class. If he wasn't driving me to school every Thursday, he would clean house from top to bottom so that I could either be superintendent or I could be a student. He did everything he could to provide me support. My husband, I could never have done it without him.

Support took on many different forms as these women shared their stories. It included a variety of examples that illustrated their husbands did what they could so that their wives could keep doing her job. Most often the items that were shared were meant to show how these men really did "keep the home fires" (remember Violet's quote). As Nancy shares, the chore of going to the grocery store is greatly appreciated. "I don't do the grocery shopping. My husband does that and for just the reason that I would never be able to get out of the grocery store and have a life."

Gwen's husband provided assistance by being the primary cook in the house during her tenure:

I used to get home very late so he often seemed to be making omelets for our dinner at 9:00. He's not a great cook, but he does a great omelet and a pretty good burger. He did those things willingly so that I could do my job.

Eileen emphasized the importance of not only how much her husband does, but how important it is that they do a lot of things together:

I couldn't have done or continue to do what I do if he were not the person who enjoyed doing what he does. He works on projects at home. He takes care of the dry cleaning. He does most of the

shopping. He likes to cook and so do I, so we do things together. I like my flower gardening; he likes his vegetable gardening. The big decisions are always made together. When we started talking about me retiring and possibly picking up consultant work, he knew that I would be traveling a lot. He's been with me almost every place, so that when I talk about where I'm going or what I'm doing--that's something that's important...He needs to have that picture of where I am and what I'm doing and he can picture it. I think that's important.

It was only after Pamela's husband's death that she realized that she no longer had the constraint of a husband to determine what path her career would take. It was after his passing she determined she didn't have to retire because he was going to, but instead could find new opportunities:

I hadn't planned on doing it [working after I was vested], but considering the way things had turned out, the circumstances, I couldn't have been more delighted because I really liked the different places that I worked and the challenges that came along with being somewhere else.

Paying back my husband.

Even after hearing the stories of how many husbands provided support in order to allow women to devote their attention to the job, I heard even more stories of guilt. For women who retired from the position, one of the main reasons they gave was to be

able to spend time with their husbands and to “pay him back” for all of the sacrifices that were made during the superintendency. As Gwen explains her retirement life:

So it's a very happy relationship and it also now affects a lot of my choices because I don't take lightly the fact that he gave, not gave all, but he did not pursue a lot of his interests. So now it's sort of, “What you want to do? I'm ready to go, whatever.” I always want to check with him because I know I'm like 30 years in debt. HA HA.

It appears that the idea of retirement was thought about much more often when a woman's spouse had already retired. There was a pressure to retire so that the couple could start a new chapter and begin doing more things together:

So, I'd been thinking about retiring. I would say in the last couple of years I was noticing that I wasn't quite as ready to jump up and run anywhere like I previously had been doing. Also, my husband was retired and he kept saying that he wanted to travel more. I was interested in traveling as well, but I was also intrigued about having time to just not be doing anything, or just new things.

Retirement to spend time together sometimes became the ultimate race against the clock. Olivia explains her husband was the sole reason for her retirement and departure from the superintendency:

My husband was a number of years older than I. When I retired I was 61 not quite 62 – so see I could have worked till I was 65 easily my health was good I could have worked. I still had the support. I figured I could ride out the support for four years. I didn't know that I

would keep it for four more years, but at least if I kept it for two I could make it through that kind of practical sort of thinking, but my husband was a fair number of years older than I and I really wanted us to have a period in our lives, another chapter in our life that I was – I think was perceptive enough that that chapter wasn't going to be but so long. And he was not – he wasn't really ill but he had some things wrong with him and I just had a feeling...

But I always knew that my family was my top responsibility and I wanted to spend some time with my husband because when I was superintendent I slept at home and that was about it. I didn't know how to do the superintendency any other way. I didn't spend very much time at home. I was rarely ever at home...

So I did want that time with my husband and with my grown children and so we spent, before he died we had almost eight years like that which I value and treasure. So that's why I left. I didn't leave because I didn't like it anymore. I didn't leave because I was tired of the politics of it all. I didn't leave because I didn't want to work so hard. My overriding reason for leaving was that I just felt that if I were going to have some times together and good memories that I needed to separate from that.

Children.

Children played a role in the stories of the superintendents, but not primarily in the reasons for why they left. The children issue presented itself more in the story of

ascending to the superintendency. Twelve of the participants have children of their own. All acknowledged that they were not raising young children while they were serving in the position of superintendent. Children make up these women's stories because in some cases, the women took time off of work to raise their children, other women stayed in teaching but did not aspire to earning additional degrees or higher administrative positions until their children were older. One woman explains that she was only able to raise her young son because of assistance from her parents:

I had thought that my son and I would start a new life down there. I had an aunt down there that was a teacher. I met a man but it, well, it just didn't work out. I just stayed that one year and then I came home to Bridgewater and my son and I lived with my parents. We all lived in the house together until my son Joseph graduated from high school. Well, first I was a teacher and then I worked up to Assistant Superintendent, but yes, my career was all in Bridgewater while he was in school there.

More often, the women talked about the juggling they had to do or the small things they needed to let go because they were going to school or working as a new administrator. One participant explains the challenge of having children while preparing to become an administrator:

...there were a lot of nights that somebody had to fix supper other than Mother and they were supportive in that there were Saturday afternoons and Sunday afternoons I couldn't go play because I was writing papers or studying or whatever. Then, right after I earned

my Master's in Administration I was appointed as assistant principal of Bailey High School.

Other stories shared reflected the difficulty in switching hats. For a woman who was an administrator in the division where her child was going to school, this woman made the conscious choice to not participate as actively as a parent as she would have if they didn't work in the district:

I mean I can remember one English teacher saying, "I don't want her in my class." Why? "Because if I say anything to her she will tell her mother I was treating her badly." But it is amazing teachers get really jumpy about that too. It's funny because since I was the assistant superintendent I think I intervened less than I should have. Looking back on it, there were things I let go about my daughter. If I had been just a regular parent I would have gone in and said, "What the hell are you doing?"

In some cases, children also prevented the women from moving to take a job. These women felt it was important that to keep their children within same school division instead of moving them around while mom was in pursuit of a bigger and better job.

I was an assistant principal for nine years because my daughter didn't want to leave that division. I moved one time to be an assistant principal. I love my daughter. She said to me, "Mom I can't leave here till I graduate. I don't want to be psychologically damaged for life. You've already moved me once. Please don't do it again!" The only thing I could say to that was "Okay. I won't move

again while you're in school." So I didn't move. I stayed there for nine years as an assistant principal and that was a good job, I loved it. I could have stayed in that position until I retired but I wanted more.

Many women acknowledged that "staying close to home" probably had an effect on their career path overall. Some women explained that certain choices were made because they remembered that they were "Mom" first:

One of the things that informed a lot of my decisions was that I was place bound and not career bound. Because there was never a point that I thought, *well I believe I will apply all over for this job. I can't apply out of state because my children were here. This was their home. My husband was here. This was – it was our home.* So in that sense I think that for women and generally speaking not in all cases, but home probably is an overriding factor. I don't know whether that's as true now as it was in my generation or generation right after me, but I think that it is to some degree. So having said that I might – could have become a superintendent sooner if I had been willing to – or I could have become the assistant superintendent much sooner if I had been willing to go that direction, but that wasn't one of my choices. It wasn't one of my values. My values were overriding in that regard.

Other interview stories revolved around children being "left behind" with their father to finish high school, or moms having to miss children being dropped off at college.

Eight of the 20 participants had no children of their own, through choice or medical reasons. Many of these women explained that not having children was not something that they saw as defining them, but it was always an area of interest to school board members and people in their communities as they were applying for superintendencies. As one woman shared stories of her initial meetings in communities, she found the subject of children was often asked. “When I walked into that room, they asked me very tough questions, many that were totally inappropriate. ‘Why don’t you have children?’ I was asked that question more than once.”

The frustration of inquiring about home life was in many cases a preview of the transparency that communities were interested in. Multiple women of this study recounted the question about having children coming up in many different inappropriate settings, like job interviews, community Q&As and teacher forums:

I was asked in an open forum with teachers why I didn’t have any children. There was a school board member sitting next to me that had taken me. A different board member took me to each one of these gatherings. There were actually several of the board members that came to that one because it was teachers’ questions. They wanted to hear what the teachers were concerned about. But when they starting asking me inappropriate questions, I thought one of the board members would have apologized profusely because they’re inappropriate questions, or at least I thought he might have said to the group, “You can’t ask those things.” It was the second time, in a second community that I’d been asked why I

didn't have children. By this time, I had a pat answer, and my answer was, "I have many children." In Shelbyville I said, "I've got 3,000 back in Townsend."

In any case, by the time the women of this study had achieved the position of superintendent, those who had children, had old enough children that caretaking was not a primary concern. In fact, since these women didn't have young children at home others set an unrealistic expectation in some cases:

Board members never hesitated in offering, "Oh, she doesn't have children. Of course she can work until three in the morning, because I'm sure her husband and cook something in the microwave himself." It was almost like I was being penalized, because I didn't have to pick someone up at day care, or I didn't have a child who had strep throat. I felt that there was just a very uneven expectation that people held me to.

While my findings may suggest that children didn't play a key role in why women left the position, there was the realization by many of the women that their children were indeed a part of the larger unit of family and maybe somewhat of a contributing factor to them leaving the position.

I also have two sons and the older son just had a baby. With my schedule I was lucky if I got to see him every 2 or 3 weeks because remember, it's not only the time you put in at the office, but from the time you get home and grab a bite to eat then you're back at it again until 12 or one clock in the morning and then you try to sleep

and it's still on your mind. It's so, so much going on and so many decisions to make. One day my son said, "Mom, you know Craig (Craig is my grandson) he's going to be grown up before you know it" and then he indicated to me that he resented, well not resented really, but he would have liked for me to have spent more time with him too.

While often times children didn't directly figure in to why a woman left her superintendency, the "after effects" that children experienced were something that the participants were quite anxious to bring up. Many explained that after watching the experiences she had as a superintendent, often children had no interest in following in their mom's footsteps. As one mother explains:

My daughter who was with me throughout my whole career, I will tell you how it affected her. When you say to her, "Wouldn't you like to be a teacher?" She shouts, "Hell no, I have had enough of schools." She wants nothing to do with education. During this whole thing with the school board chair and all - it really affected her. There was no way at all she would consider being a teacher, a school administrator. There's no way she'd forget what happened to me.

Parents.

The story of a female superintendent's family is a much different story than you would hear from an early-career administrator (like an assistant principal or principal, for instance) because a woman tends to come to the superintendency much later in her

career than other positions. For the most part, children do not play as large a role in the story because if there are children, they are usually grown by the time the woman ascends to the position of superintendent. So the stories do not deal as much with the juggling, sacrifices, and constraints of having young children. What many of these stories do highlight, however, is the other end of the care giving spectrum. There still were stories of woman as caretaker, however. Because many of the women did not enter the position of superintendent until they were in their 50s, the care of aging parents became a family challenge that many of the women spoke of. Many of the women of this study shared that their decision to leave was influenced by family issues related to aging parents.

One woman's story found her moving to a new superintendency in another state so that she could be in a position that would put her closer to her aging mother.

I came back east basically because my mother at that time was still living in Troy County. I was looking for someplace on the east coast where I could get a pretty place in a good school division where I thought I might want to retire.

This move was preparing this superintendent for not only her final career stop, but it also took into account a place where she would like to remain once she left the position of superintendent. She was thinking of herself, but also for the possible care she might have to provide for her mother.

Other women watched the decline of their mothers while they were in the position. One woman struggled with her mother's attempts to "check in" with her while she was working.

She would call the School Board Office and she couldn't understand why I didn't answer the phone. She had dementia so she was never quite sure why she had to talk to other people before she could talk to me. I used to tell the ladies, "If Mother calls, just be patient with her. Just put her through." I knew that I might be right in the middle of something but I had experienced enough times of her telling my staff, "I want to talk to her right now!" I mean, it's my mom. So I made a point to stop what I was doing to always take her call.

Not all of the women had the opportunity for their mother to just "check in" when they felt the need. One superintendent's mother's health made her evaluate just how much longer she needed to be doing this position:

My mother at that time was 83 years old and I, when you are superintendent if you can get by with working 16 hours a day you're really lucky. I would drive by my mother's driveway everyday on my way to work and I would say "This evening I want to stop and see my mother" and it would rarely work out. Often she'd be in bed by the time I got off work to even go home. I got to feeling guilty. At some point in my tenure as superintendent she was diagnosed as and she was starting to show the early stages of Alzheimer's...I was with my mom for a few days away at Myrtle Beach and she and I were walking on the beach hand-in-hand talking about how pretty it was and she was trying to tell me stories from the past. I

just sensed a need to get away from the 18 hour workday and to be with her. I thought to myself, *when I do get to visit will she know my name the next time I stop by?* Something just spoke to my heart that day and I just thought, *you know is it worth it? As much as I love education is it worth missing the time with your mom? Is what I'm doing worth that?* And when I answered that question, the answer was no.

Worrying about a parent's declining health is a serious consideration, but becoming the primary caregiver to both aging parents is an even greater struggle. As one woman found out, there was no way to do both jobs successfully:

Harriet: I left before the end of the contract. I left because of what was going on here. My mom and dad were both ill. The choice was I either put them in a nursing home or come home and I could not see a nursing home for them. So I had them with me in this house for four years and took care of both of them. My dad, he was the bed-ridden one and mom had gotten to the point where she just couldn't take care of him herself. I had been coming home every weekend. It all started with the comment, "I just don't have the first idea of what I am going to cook." So on weekends I would come home with groceries, cook for the weekend – this was before I was retired – prepare all the meals for the week, label everything, put the menus on the door of the refrigerator. I did that for a while and

that is completely exhausting, especially since my job during the week was exhausting as well.

Anyway, it was a very different job, but after I retired from the superintendency that was my full-time job for four years. The then governor offered an early retirement option. It gave me five more years of experience than I had if you were over 50 years old. At any rate, it was because of the timing of his offer that I was able to do it. I couldn't have retired without it.

Kerry: I can't help but wonder if that early retirement option hadn't presented itself how much longer you would have kept up the pace of traveling back and forth.

Harriet: I don't know. I can't say, but I do know that I was exhausted. I was leaving one demanding job to drive hours home to attend to another demanding 24-7 job, but it was a labor of love.

Especially after hearing the stories related to family, it was most obvious that women believe that they have to leave the position of superintendent in order to have a life. When dealing with the topic of husbands, children, grandchildren, or parents, the stories show that a work life and a personal life are not integrated. It still appears to be a choice for one or the other.

Finding 3: Taking Care of Herself

After 39 years in education in every position imaginable, a husband, two kids, and a list a mile long of things wrong with me, I came to the realization my health was not going to let me continue.

For the first time, I had to stop worrying about taking care of others and knew I would have to take care of myself.

A superintendent and her health.

I don't think I was prepared to hear as many stories as I did about a superintendent's health. Not only about health issues that occurred while the woman was in the position, but instances of lingering chronic conditions that remained long after she left the position.

The pressure and stress of the position.

Just as the women had all shared with me how they "accidentally" went into administration, all 20 participants provided plenty of examples of just how stressful and pressure packed the position of superintendent can be. With this amount of continual stress, the position had a physical effect on many of the participants:

I really would say that I didn't take the time to take care of myself and it took a toll on me. I didn't want to take the time out because I wanted to get done what I needed to get done. When you finally look up from your desk or your computer it is 8 o'clock at night and you say, "Well I'll do that tomorrow," but the same thing happens over and over. The superintendency I have a feeling a lot of people don't really realize the pressure or the full extent of the job that is involved. It's a stressful job and it's a time consuming job.

The long work days and the seven day a week expectation they put on themselves also took a toll. One woman explains, "I worked 14 hour days for those

years including weekends and the stress on me was just too much. But I did finish my contract.”

The last thing that many of these women wanted to do, however, was let people see just how pressure packed the position could be. They kept a great deal of the stress to themselves:

I have got into the habit of not calling it a weakness, especially since I didn't want anyone to claim that this proves a woman can't do it if I say I'm stressed out. But I will tell you, I was stressed out!

At some point, according to the women, living the adage of “never letting them see you sweat” is going to catch up with a person. The demands of the job don't ever stop and for some women, it means walking away:

The job sucks too much energy out of you. People suck energy out of you all the time. So, it doesn't mean you become impersonal, it means that you find your own way to keep your energy level up. Yeah, I definitely had the energy sucked out of me. I lost my health, I lost my innovation. I didn't lose my passion, but it wasn't fun anymore. And, I always tell myself that if it wasn't fun anymore, then I needed to be doing something else. But, I was going to make them pay me. I wasn't going to walk out for free.

The ballooning (or shrinking) superintendent.

As the women shared in their stories, the superintendency is a 7-day-a-week job that often finds people behind their desks too long or behind the wheel of a county-issued automobile. There wasn't a lot of time for exercise. One woman explained that

she let her main method of exercise go while she served in the position. “I didn’t exercise as much as I should have, I used to walk before I was in the superintendency, but that had to go by the wayside.” Even after leaving the position and heading into another position, June felt that she still didn’t have time to get herself healthy:

I didn’t take care of myself. I didn’t feel comfortable jogging around outside or up and down the street. There was no gym in the area because you are looking at a small community. We were renting a house so the yard wasn’t mine to do the other kinds of things. So I choose food as my vice. And after the superintendency I went right into my university job so I still had weight issues. It wasn’t till afterwards that I took the time to let that telephone cord unwind and just get healthy. That’s when I reclaimed my health and I lost 80 pounds.

The challenge of food was also something that was shared in a number of the stories. These were very smart women not making very healthy choices about what to eat or when to eat:

I gained a lot of weight that was probably the biggest thing that happened to me. Because I often didn’t get dinner and I would get to the McDonald’s on the highway between Frazier County and Rural Creek. I’d go through the drive-thru and it would be 9:30 or 10 o’clock at night. I’m getting the Big Mac and the fries. The people at the drive-thru knew me. Many times that would be the only thing I’d really eaten all day and I was eating on the way home. I know it

was terrible for me, but it was because of my lifestyle. I gained a lot of weight.

Melissa echoed the same sentiments. She knew this was an issue for a number of her superintendent friends:

I know one of my other colleagues probably talked about this because we used to talk about it. I ate way too much drive thru food. I would drive through a few times a week because I could eat in my car as I was driving from one place to another during my day.

Even if she wasn't frequenting a drive thru for a meal, the food choices that were often presented to the superintendent made it difficult to make sensible choices. Violet explained, "If you went out to like a dinner or something as part of your role as superintendent there is a lot of fried chicken and mashed potatoes. It always tasted good but not necessary what's best for your health." The desire to be around children in the schools also made it difficult to find healthy options. Olivia explained that was one of the concessions she made to be around students. "Sometimes I went to the schools and had lunch with the children which I enjoyed. Of course I ate too many cafeteria rolls too."

One superintendent analyzed what caused her weight problem while she was in the position. Eating was her way to deal with what was going on around her.

I had struggled with a bit of a weight problem when I was in the superintendency. You know it's interesting they say people acclimate to the community and the people around you in what they eat and how they act and how they behave and I fell right into that

and I gained about 50 pounds. The way I dealt with things was you know maybe I will make cookies, maybe I will make a cake, maybe I will eat this pie whatever. When I left the superintendency I think I had realized I am truly an emotional eater too because I had kind of eaten my way through the stress of whatever. You realize then, at post superintendency, that you are just stuffing down all the other stuff. For me it was just a manifestation of what I was trying to deal with, but really didn't know if I could deal with it publically because I had to be the one person that was cool and confident and approachable.

Other women experienced the opposite situation. They didn't have time to eat regularly. The job just kept them too busy. Catherine explains how the job contributed to her lack of eating:

Some people thought that I was always trying to keep an eye on my weight. The truth is I couldn't gain weight during that time if I tried. I was a size 2 because I never could find a time to eat an actual meal.

Lisa explained that she made a point to take the time to eat lunch. She realized she would need her energy to keep doing the job well:

I found myself pretty regularly not going to lunch or not stopping for lunch, but I put a stop to that. I think you have to be conscious about what you are eating and when you are eating. So after a while in the job I made a point to say "I'm going to have lunch and

I'm not going to have it at this desk." Every once in a while I would fall back into the bad habit of not eating, but I really tried to make a conscious effort to eat and keep myself healthy.

Chronic health and the superintendency.

A number of the women explained that this extended time of not taking care of themselves manifested in having serious health conditions. This became a pivotal consideration to whether or not they would be able to continue in the position:

Actually, that last year of my superintendency I developed thyroid issues and that is a terrible thing to deal with since it affects your whole body – your emotional, mental, and physical state. I'm still having those issues and having a hard getting it regulated. My physical health is very important to me. I've always been a very healthy, athletic person. I walked every day before I took the superintendency, but when I took the superintendency, it gets dark about 8 o'clock and when you don't get home til after 9 o'clock, you don't get to walk very often...So, I think it's just a combination of sitting at your desk all day, in meetings all day, and it took a toll on me physically. And then you have your emotional and mental states too that you have to deal with. It takes a toll when you have so much on your mind all the time.

Certain situations in the position would often cause health issues to flare up at what was often the worst time imaginable:

My blood pressure would spike when there would be a crisis, but then it would go back down. The doctor was confused and I was confused because most of the time it was quite low but if anything happened it would go so high it was off the wall. After that happening a few times, he finally put me on two different types of medication to help it. There were other issues as well. I had stomach issues, ulcers. I had flare ups of so many different things. It takes a toll. I needed to spend time taking care of myself because I certainly wasn't doing a good job of it while I was superintendent.

In some cases, doctors tried to counsel their patients. Nine of the women shared that they took anxiety medication while they were in the position. Doctors also warned that medication shouldn't be the answer in all cases.

Anyway, it became very much a health issue for me. My blood pressure at one point went up to 195/130 and my doctor, God bless her, said, "I'm not changing your medication. I'm not putting you on any new medication, and I'm not giving you more medication because on the weekends your blood pressure goes down and on the weekdays it goes right back up. You need to get out of there. It is not a healthy place." My parents were saying, "Get out of there, it's going to kill you."

At some point, the impact on their health forced a few of the women to make the decision to leave before they were ready to. Some of the women felt they still had more to accomplish, but their bodies would not cooperate. Alice explained how her health

finally forced her need to leave. “I had a heart catheterization in July and high blood pressure. It was not a good thing and so I knew by Christmas that I could not stay there another year.”

Even health issues that were not directly contributed to the stress of the position were certainly affected by the non-stop pace of the job:

I’ve been blessed with miraculous good health in my lifetime and not really had any major illnesses, but, my family is plagued with arthritis. It is a chronic thing, most every member of my family has this condition and cold exacerbates it. My exposure to extreme cold in Capital City did not help the arthritis...The arthritis is the crippling kind where it distorts your feet which limits your ability to walk as well as having to endure the excruciating pain. It was really ultimately the deciding factor. I knew that I could not do the job feeling like that. Capital City is not the kind of place where I felt that I could be recuperating on the job because there is always just too much taking place and I believe that if you can’t do the job you should go. So my health took precedence.

Not only did the health issues have an effect on when a woman decided to leave, it often also played into whether she worked again after the superintendency:

Well, the position definitely impacts your health. I firmly believe that and another reason why I decided that when I retire, I’m finished. I’m not going to continue to put myself through more stress. Part of

it was my body and what I felt had been done to my body, the abuse basically.

Lingering health issues post-superintendency.

Even after leaving the position, a few of the women explained that they are still suffering from the effects that the job had on their bodies. Some women continue to take medication years after they have left the position. Eileen attributes the non-stop stress for the effect it had on her health:

I was tired of it, I was sick, my body had gone into total, I don't know what, the stress had taken its toll on me, I guess would be the best way to put it. And, some of that has still carried over if they say that stress is part of it. I had something called polymyalgia rheumatica, which is a women's...they don't know what causes it, but it's stress, and it's part of the exoskeleton, and it's extremely painful and I went on Prednisone. I didn't come off Prednisone until last year. So, that was four years of taking Prednisone. When I came off Prednisone, I found that my whole body had fibromyalgia. But, the Prednisone has just covered taking care of one. So, the stress had just totally deteriorated my body, my health and everything else.

A few of the women also shared that they worked with therapists after leaving to help “get over” the position. One woman explains, “I had to go into therapy because I couldn't sleep and I was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder actually because I never knew where the attacks were coming from.”

The “financial health” of the superintendent.

When hearing the stories of these women, one of the most interesting findings was the women telling me about the role that finances played in to their decision to leave. It is hard to tell, but I wonder if this would have even been a finding if the national economy were different than it is now.

Letting the retirement system work for you.

There were a few women in the study who had held superintendencies in multiple states. In some cases, these women moved from one state to another to capitalize on the ability to become vested in two states retirement systems. These “movers” shared that going to another state to earn a second retirement was a very “male” thing to do. As Frances Barrett, a “double dipper,” explained:

One of the things that attracted me to Clark County was a headhunter firm approached me and at first I told them I didn’t think I would be interested. But, one of the headhunters remembered that I had worked in this other state...He mentioned to me it was a lot cheaper to buy back your years in this other state. I would not be eligible to buy it back until I’ve worked for five years. But after you work for five years in the state you could buy back. So that made me think.

As Frances has spent twelve years in the superintendency in this second state, she thinks about her future and returning to Virginia to finish her career and earn a second full retirement.

Even though I'm eligible for a full retirement from this state in 2014 and my current contract does go to 2014, I would not retire then. I think I'll plan on returning to Virginia. I'm not retired from Virginia. My 15 years of experience is sitting in the Virginia retirement system waiting for me to turn 65...I could draw it out now but it would be at a reduced amount. And it never gets larger than after the day I turned 65. But not being 65 I could go back to Virginia and work and increase my final average compensation from what it was and it would increase that part of the formula significantly.

Another participant was able to retire due to the benefit of an early retirement incentive that was offered by the Governor while she served as superintendent.

There was a recession in the state and the governor offered the early retirement option. So it gave me five more years of experience than I had and I was over 50. At any rate, it was because of the timing of his offer that I was able to do it. I couldn't have retired without it.

To buy or not to buy.

The tales of houses and homes were also readily shared by the women of this study. With so many women living in commuter marriages, it should be no surprise that there were issues with having multiple homes.

I had given up everything. We were in debt up to our ears. We bought property we couldn't afford because we were assuming we would sell the house back home from when I moved here from out of state. We also had to sell a piece of property that we had in the northern part of Lake Shore that was waterfront with a house. Since I was superintendent, I couldn't live in Lake Shore, I had to live in Autumnville. So I had to buy this new property. We were constantly on the phone with realtors about one house or another. It was stressful, on top of the fact I was starting a new job.

Another woman purchased her home because she felt it was an obligation of achieving the position, an obligation that her male counterparts didn't feel:

What was interesting is when I got the job I bought a house because I felt it was the right thing to do. Every time I have taken on a leadership role I always buy a house because I want to become a member of the community. No other superintendents felt they had to do that. Let's see, the guy that was there before me rented a house and left before the rental term ended. The guy before him rented, the guy that followed me rented. Have people talked to you about how financially precarious this position can be?

For one participant, Violet, the ongoing saga of her house played a very large part of her leaving the superintendency and it continues to play a part in her story even today:

I had a house there which is still my burden. I'll talk to you about the financial sacrifices I made. I guess I should say that now. I was expected to buy a house...Okay this is 2004, so the market is good, you could reasonably assume that if you bought a house on the water, that you would at least be able to get what you paid for it or better. That everything you invested in it would certainly come back to you. In Lakeside, they had no condos or townhouses. There was nothing ideal for a single woman to live in. So I found this house. It was on the water on the river. It was a very nice house but it had three bedrooms, two baths, living room, dining room, kitchen and a full basement that was used as a shop previously and a huge yard that needed maintenance...Okay, but it was the best deal I could find.

There was so much stuff down there that they would show me and I wouldn't be able to live in it. Some of these houses still had the shag carpet from 1970's in it...I was like no I am too busy at my job to have time to renovate an entire house. This house I bought is neat; it's got lots of windows and looks right out on the river. It was a good place to live for the six years I was there. It's on Waite Lane. I joke and say it's the weight I'm still carrying around. I can never really fully retire till I can sell that house...

Now ironically the new superintendent is renting it because she was not being required to buy a home. No one can require anyone to

buy a home in this home market, right? And she is smart; I laughingly say she is smarter than the last superintendent...She is renting it, but I still personally pay \$700 a month on it. That's the differential between what she is paying me and what I have to pay for the house each month in mortgage and in insurance. I pay \$700 a month for a house I'm not living in. I just put the house back on the market again to see what might happen. There is no traffic there at all, I mean it's not like, I'm selling it for the wrong price. There is just nobody looking. If I was selling it for a dollar I still don't know if anyone would buy it because there is just no traffic regardless of the price...

So it's put me into a financial situation that's not good. I'm going to have to keep working until I finally sell that house.

Moving for the money.

A number of women left the position of superintendent before they had earned the number of years needed to earn retirement in Virginia. For some of them, this meant having to find another position to earn the final years necessary to get fully vested in the retirement system. In some cases, the women were successful in reaching full retirement:

I left because I got a much higher paying job as an assistant superintendent in a larger school district. I wanted three years in that new position so I could retire comfortably and it wasn't going to

happen if I had stayed as superintendent in that little tiny place with that measly salary.

Another woman was more concerned with earning the best salary she could to boost her retirement, no matter the position. While she believed men wouldn't take a "step-back" to another position like a principalship after achieving the top role in a school division, Karen explained that she was going to do what she could to make the biggest impact financially. "People couldn't believe I went back to being a principal. I thought it was great. I got to go back to being around students and working with instruction AND got paid more than I did being a superintendent!"

Betty had wanted to move to another superintendency for her last few years to increase her retirement salary, but she found that those second positions were hard to come by for many women:

I was thinking that I would only be applying for superintendencies, but obviously I wasn't chosen to be promoted to something bigger and better. That wasn't the case for me, nope. Not surprisingly all of the male superintendents I knew that had been in that one job and were looking for the next, well they all had gone on to a much higher paying better job. So I asked VSBA [Virginia School Boards Association] to help me. The only way they helped me was to get me an assistant superintendent job. But I wanted the superintendent's job, I wanted to move on to another superintendency, but it wasn't in the cards...I wasn't considered for any of those positions. I guess the reason I didn't get one of those

positions is because those are “saved.” From my perspective it appears they are saved for good friends and golf buddies [of the Executive Director of VSBA]. That’s my perception.

In some cases, when a woman moved from one state to another, she was not in a position long enough to earn full retirement benefits from Virginia. One woman decided it wasn’t worth the extra money to be working in a position she didn’t like for her last few working years:

In other words my work here was done, but I needed two more years for retirement in Virginia. So I went to the superintendents of Jefferson and Edgeville, they both said they would find a job for me. And so I thought Jefferson had the kind of the job that I wanted...I liked the job but unfortunately it wasn’t a perfect match because I was child centered, and Jefferson are really test centered...because of a variety of reasons I left early. I did a good job while I was there, but I wish I hadn’t left that second year because I never get the retirement money that I should have had, but anyway it’s not – you can’t say the job is all money.

When you can’t retire.

The stories of women walking away from a job they love are very difficult to hear. It is even more disappointing when women leave for financial reasons. One story in particular shared just how difficult it can be:

I put myself in financial jeopardy in Landstown because I wasn’t making a lot of money obviously, right up until the last year or so

and I finally negotiated a contract that was high enough to help. But I had already just gotten myself into trouble because I had dipped into my savings just to maintain the house in Landstown, my family home, and I have a third house. I have a house in Kingston that is a rental property. But between the three houses one of them needs something all the time, think about maintenance. I had one income. I'd always been used to having two incomes with my husband. All of a sudden I'm living on one income. That house in Landstown should have never been sold to me. Why did the bank even approve me, at my age? I was single and at an age where I wasn't going to have 30 years to pay back a mortgage, I would be so old. Then I had this opportunity at the university. I thought I could come home and be part of the university, what a dream! I was getting older and I laughingly said, "I'm doing all these career moves very quickly now because I'm getting older and I don't have time to spend two, three, four years with somebody."...

I took a cut in salary to go to the university but I thought that it would be ok because I would have my VRS retirement as well as the salary. So my leaving was motivated for financial reasons. So I thought, *well I can go to the university, go back home, live in my house that's paid for, sell this house down here and start working on getting myself financially stable for retirement.* Well after I told the Landstown board I was leaving and I had signed everything, the

university level HR said, “Oh no, no. We have an agreement with the state, even though we have two retirement systems at the university, if you are VRS then you can’t switch over.” So I took a salary reduction to leave and I could not retire. This was not helping to get my finances in order. I worked at the university for a while, but everywhere I’ve gone, I’ve lost money. So one day I just said, “This is not for me and what else are you going to do?”...

I’m working as a consultant and I’m excited because no woman in Virginia has ever worked as a consultant in this field. So I thought this would be kind of like breaking a glass ceiling if I could work for them in this way. So I wrote a job proposal and I asked for full-time. Of course the company would have loved to pay me part-time but financially I couldn’t afford that. I knew they had to have me full-time. They tried to push part-time because they explained they already had a retired male superintendent in Pennsylvania who was doing the same thing part-time. I said, “No, I have to have full-time for this to work for me financially.” So they hired me full-time...It’s kind of an amazing transformation. I’m making more money now than I’ve ever made and that’s without my retirement which I also now will get...But isn’t it sad that I had to leave the world that I really loved because I couldn’t afford to do it anymore?

Finding 4: I'm Not the Right Fit for the Community

But I didn't fit socially. The way I dressed did not fit. The crazy flamboyant woman that I am didn't fit. But it was my heart that fit there. I knew in my heart I could do something great for this school system, but the rest of the community wasn't right for me. I basically left because I needed a social life.

Learning the community norms.

Sometimes the only way to be hired as superintendent is to take a position in a small and/or remote community. Many times, these communities are located in the most rural counties. As June explained, she was eager to experience a different type of community as the superintendent:

I sent in my information to be superintendent to a very rural community. I told you before I had done everything except rural education. I didn't want to just read about it I wanted to immerse myself in it and see what it was really like. So we drove out here and did the interview and it was a whole different world. Imagine going into a place where the former superintendent was there at the interview with a plate of cookies welcoming you to the school division. The school board members were in the back and some are dressed up and some aren't. We sat with tea and coffee and it was just such a different community for me. For example, there was no stoplight in the entire community. So you are looking at a

community of 5,000 or 6,000 people spread out over 330 square miles. It was very, very rural, but beautiful, so, so beautiful.

The challenge for June is that she was eager, but she was also nervous about the move. Many times the incoming superintendent is viewed with “outsider” status.

In addition to having to learn all about the new school division, these women who moved to small rural communities found they needed to spend time learning about the community as a whole. There is a great deal more shared knowledge in a smaller community and a much different power dynamic. This was often a new leadership experience for the new superintendent:

I came from the outside. I came to find later on that in this community, the walls are tight and bonds are tight. You are an insider or you are an outsider. I was an outsider. I thought to myself, *at this time this challenge is more than school, this challenge is more than bringing up test scores, this challenge is more than bringing research to teachers. This challenge is going to be about me integrating into this community and my husband integrating into this community so that we can be accepted.*

Because I believe that people first have to buy into you before they buy into some of the things you have to say. So I realized at that moment that it wasn't about me wearing really beautiful suits and shoes, it was more about me wearing a skirt and a sweater and realizing that it wasn't about them deciding to come to where I was. It was about me putting me in the background, leaving the ego and

all that stuff away and saying I'm going to meet them exactly where they are and try to figure out where we are together and what we need.

These women often had to realize that they may need to adapt to their community so they didn't stick out as different.

Here is another thing I did. My car – I had a black Mercedes – I told my husband we are not bringing my car here. So we left my car on the other side of the state and we were going to sell it. I said, "I'm sticking out like a sore thumb anyway, I'm not going to make this worse by being the only person who drives a Mercedes. I've got to be sensitive and compassionate and realize that what I'm here for is to help the kids and help teachers."

Many times the biggest challenge with assimilating into the community is when an outsider would challenge the status quo. Alice found that her appearance in the community worried a lot of the power brokers:

My coming into the county was problematic for many folks in the community. I was a threat to a lot of people, particularly white people; the powerful ones who were privileged. Like the ones who thought the gifted program belonged to their children. These were the people who were calling the shots for years, but they met their match when I came into the position.

Community members were interested in finding as much as they could about this new woman as well. A number of women shared stories of meeting community members once they were in the job:

So my first day on the job and I'm a little nervous and dressed up in one of my brand new suits and ready to go and meet people and just full of enthusiasm and excitement and I had a gentleman come to the school board office, walk past the secretary and walk right into my office. He was a country guy, had on his overalls and cap and boots and sat down at the table and pushed his hat back and he looked at me and said, "Darling where'd you sprout?" I paused and I thought to myself, *I have no idea what he is asking me*. So you know I'd get myself all situated and say, "Well Sir, if you mean my most recent job, I came from Metro City." He goes, "That's not what I asked you. I asked where'd you sprout?" I said, "I'm from Cleveland." He looked at me, pounded his hand on the table and said, "Damn Yankee! Damn school board hiring a Yankee!" Then he got up and walked out without saying another word. I thought to myself in that moment, what have I gotten myself into?

Luckily, for a number of the women who found themselves in a "foreign community," there were people on their staff that helped them negotiate the unwritten norms of living in that community. As one woman explained, her central office staff made her acclimating to the county so much more successful:

My senior staff members were the ones who helped me. They were the ones who were so committed to me succeeding that they did everything possible, so let me know where I needed to go, who the power players were in the community that when someone died I needed to go over and sign the book. . But even things like if you don't show up when someone died in town at the funeral home to sign the book. You just need to do that. People would teach me these things that I didn't know. Even if I didn't know the person, I needed to go and sign the book. So there are these things that I fell into – these landmines of not knowing. Luckily, people would pull me aside and say, “You need to do this; you need to do that.” That I needed to shop at the local mom and pop grocery store and I needed to make sure that I ate at the local little restaurant, I would have to attend the parades in town, and I need to go to the Historical Society dinner. I needed to – you know all of the little things that were just expected, the unwritten rules that no one really knew about... it's like they opened this book of the unwritten rules and helped me check them off to help me be successful.

Sexist views.

Many times, moving to a rural community meant moving to a location with “traditional” values. In many cases, this was the first time people in a community had a woman leading an organization of any type. This cognitive dissonance often appeared right from the beginning, when a superintendent was being interviewed:

My first job, down in Hatton's Glen, after they hired me, basically they said, "Bring your husband, we want to meet him." They always want to meet the spouse. I went down, and we settled on the contract and what I wanted in the contract. Then they took me out to dinner with Walter. The restaurant we went to, there were people there that knew it was the school board. Obviously, they knew everybody. They saw me and they saw Walter, they thought Walter was the superintendent. That was the big thing. They saw the man. My husband thought it was a hoot. They saw the man and figured they knew the story.

Then when a woman was hired, the anger from community members was often voiced. Often times it was because she was an outsider, but more often it was because she had power through her position. Three of the women in the study had struggles in their new communities because they were women with power:

When I got there I think the surprise was from some of the community members that the school board had brought in this young woman who we didn't know. Plus, I also came in as the highest paid person in the county which caused a lot of conflict.

The women shared that they thought a number of situations that occurred were solely due to the fact they were a woman in the position. The taunting and intimidation tactics that were used, they believed, would never have been employed if they were a man coming in from the outside. The public comments that were made at school board meetings were often extraordinarily inappropriate:

I would get questioned by community members all the time. People would stand up and yell, “She doesn’t go outside and know what it’s like when it’s snowing.” “She is just calling off school drinking cocoa in her pajamas and this has just got to stop.” It was a school board meeting but it was a free for all. I had to sit there looking dignified and I had to listen and just take it. I’m sure none of my male colleagues ever got accused of sitting at home drinking cocoa in their pajamas!

Not only was operating in the position difficult, trying to become a member of the community also posed a challenge. As one woman explained, even trying to buy a house in the county proved to be more of a challenge than it should have been:

When we tried to buy a house in the community, the people that we were going to buy a house from, they had jacked up the price of the house. They had told somebody that because I was a woman plus I was a superintendent and I could afford it, they were just going to get whatever they wanted from me. Well luckily, one of my supporters shared that story with me so we walked away from the deal. That story just shows I know that there were people who were going to try and take advantage of me.

Once a woman was in the position, the taunting and intimidation continued. In some cases, there were scare tactics used to try to get the woman to leave. One “outsider” explained the phone threats she received:

When I first moved in and was still living by myself, I started getting threatening phone calls at four in the morning telling me, “Get out of town or we will make you get out.” If these calls were meant to be scary, it worked. If they thought they were going to get rid of me, however, they had another thing coming!

These threats could occur anywhere - at meetings, out in public, or at her home. The one thing that it often did was keep a woman on edge. She didn’t know when someone would “go after her” next. In one case, after making a number of difficult personnel decisions in the division, Sofia Talford said she felt wide open to public attack at all times:

I was at a school board meeting and there were a number of community members who came to speak. Unfortunately, I should say they came to yell. They were calling me “baby doll.” They called me “white trash.” They yelled, “You go back to where you came from or you’ll leave in a box!” It was horrible. It didn’t stop at meetings. I had my county car vandalized. Stones were thrown at my own personal car. I was spit at. When I had gotten the job I had bought a house there. I now had to have the sheriff assign police officers to sit in my driveway. I couldn’t find a way to get out of that community fast enough.

The interest in “getting rid of the outsider” was often an emotional blow to the superintendent who came to the position with the sole purpose of helping children. Unfortunately, in some cases, this conflicted with the community:

This job was something that I put my heart and soul into. I would have stayed there, I loved it. I was having a great time and I thought I was doing great things for kids and teachers. But, there was resentment toward me there because number one, I was a female and I was making what the community thought was way too much money. The farmers weren't getting raises so people wondered why all the teachers should get raises.

Watching the superintendent.

When a superintendent moves in from the outside, there is always a heightened level of curiosity from members of the community. In smaller, rural communities, the happenings of the superintendent could be viewed as big news. As one woman explained, "Superintendent watching is one of the biggest pastimes in Candle County. You can't go anywhere without everyone's eyes on you. They're just waiting for you to do something for them to talk about."

Another woman explained that her larger school division broadcasted the school board meetings on television. This contributed to the number of people who would recognize her while she was out in the community:

Well it goes with the territory and it's definitely eyes on the superintendent. The Middleview school board meetings were televised. You could think of it as the first reality show because the meetings were circuses because of all of the ridiculousness going on. Public comments would last for over an hour. It would be people's chance to say something that would be broadcast

throughout the community. I couldn't go anywhere without being recognized. It was the highest rated show in the area. Not only did they broadcast it live but they broadcasted all throughout the month. I tried to understand what was so highly rated and someone finally explained to me it was the only reality show on TV at the time. I could not go anywhere without people coming up and saying, "I saw you on that board meeting last week."

This "being on all the time" mentality could prove to be challenging. The superintendent felt eyes on her whether she was in the grocery store, at the gym, or out to dinner. One woman explained all of her decisions always seemed to be on display and how she knew how important it was to meet expectations:

It's part of the territory. You always run into people on the weekends and you can't look unkempt. Jeans are fine, but I wouldn't go out with dirty blue jeans, or blue jeans with holes in them. I work out at a gym when I can, but I always make sure I look presentable when I leave the gym. I'm not going to leave the gym sweaty and go out to the store.

Another challenging situation is going out to dinner in the community. Tracey explained the challenge of eating in a restaurant in town:

Every time I went out to dinner in town, I would have this internal dialog going on in my head. "Should you have something to drink? You never know who will be watching. Maybe you should order the salad instead of

the fries. Can't you just hear what people will be saying about you if they see you ordering fries?!"

Eileen explained how she dealt with all of the eyes on her. She found she would just leave to get some privacy:

You're never off duty, ever, 24/7, whether you are at home or away.

As far as time away goes, people in the community know you and they always like to watch what you're doing, so it is important to get as far away as you can get.

Isolation and loneliness.

In some situations, the differences with the community were just too much to have to deal with over time. While a few women shared they may have been "fitting in" while at work, the rest of the time left them feeling extremely alone. Nights proved to be extra challenging:

I just got tired of leaving work at night and having nothing to do and no one to do it with. There wasn't even a place to eat unless you stopped at the Food Lion. I sit here and think about how spoiled I am to have all these choices here. I mean when I was living there, my work day would end. I was tired, I hadn't really eaten anything all day, I was starving, and I knew there was nothing at home in the refrigerator. I would very rarely get groceries to take home and fix something. I would just buy a little salad at the Food Lion to inhale once I got home. But seriously, for shopping, if you needed like a

pair of pantyhose or something, it was 45 minutes to a Wal-Mart. I really was isolated.

For Violet, while she loved the school division, staff, and students, the community ultimately proved to be too different to make her happy. While she enjoyed everything she was able to do while she was in the position, she felt that a large part of her life was suffering because of the detachment she felt from her busy social life:

Socially there was nothing there. My social life was always back home in Romeo Township. I would come home every weekend, every weekend I would come home because my social life was theatre, the arts, college football games, and gala events for charity. These are the things that I do. My social life is rather elegant, let's just put it that way. In contrast, my friends and associates in the school division are not like that. Church was their social life. I just couldn't make that my entire social life. That really factored in to why I left the position.

Summary

The twenty women who participated in this study all explained that they believed they had a good idea of what the position of superintendent was going to be like when they entered the position. In all cases, these women found that the position was much different than they had ever perceived it to be. While this chapter has highlighted the four main findings of why these women left their superintendencies, it is important to note that the women explained that all departures (whether moving to another superintendency versus abandoning the position altogether) were not caused by a

single event. Even for women who left the position because of retirement and wanting to spend time with family chose this departure because of other events – school board elections, health concerns (her own or family member), or end of contract.

The position of superintendent is a very complex one and the stories that were shared by these women help highlight the many conflicting issues that arise while serving in the position. It is the difficulty of keeping a strong instructional focus while keeping a number of different groups happy – the School Board, Board of Supervisors/City Council, school division employees, community members, and family members – all while successfully handling all other aspects of the position (budget, facilities, personnel, politicking, etc.).

Many times the very last consideration was what would be best for the woman herself. For six of these participants it was only when chronic health concerns or serious financial ramifications came into play that these woman ever thought to factor herself into her decision to leave. Ironically, these women who spoke so often about Noddings' "ethic of care" (2003) spent disproportionate amounts of time caring for others, but ultimately deprived themselves of self-care and caused them to leave the position.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary

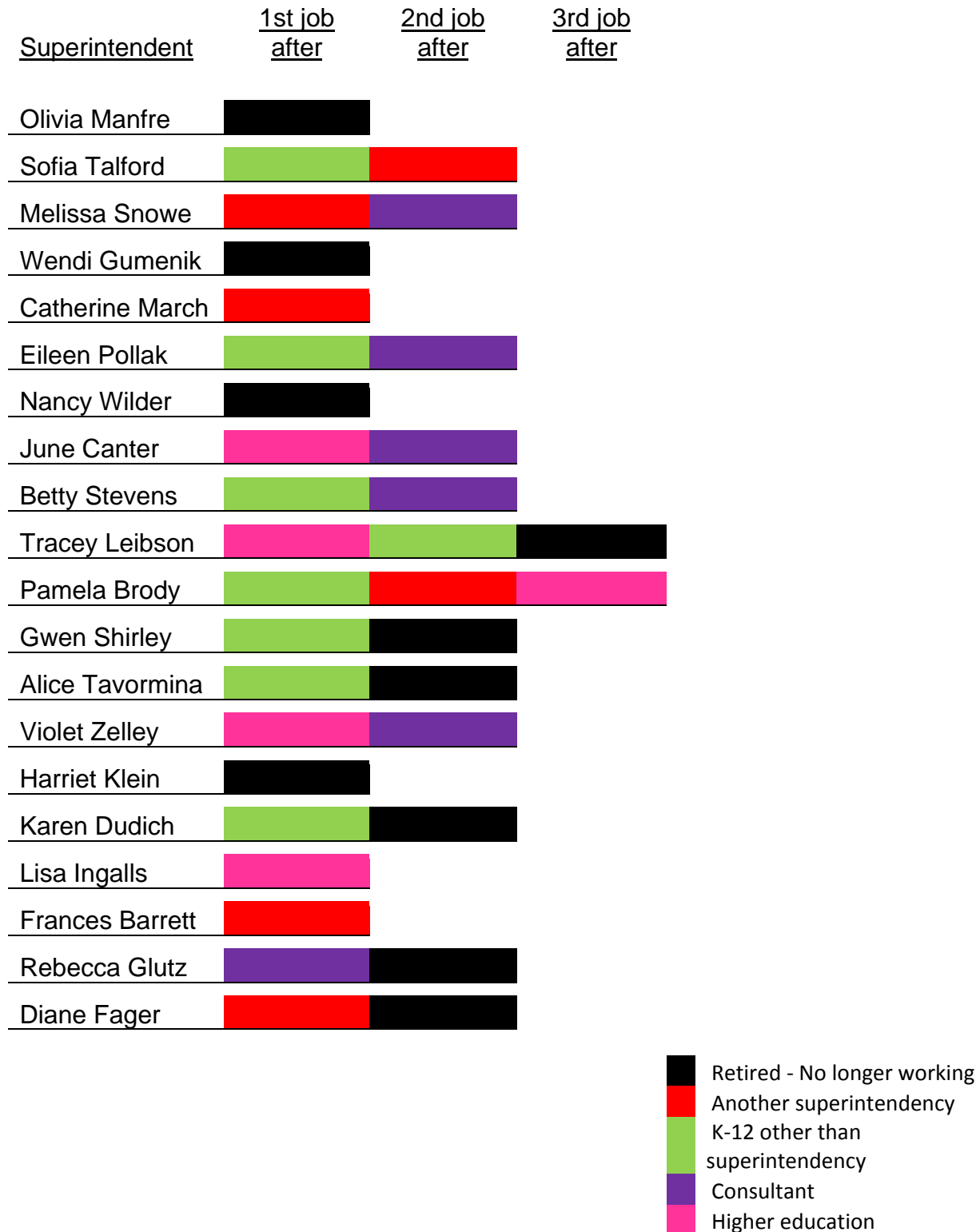
The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore why women leave the position of superintendent. Through the interviews of 20 women who held a superintendency in the Commonwealth of Virginia, I was interested in hearing the stories of why they left the position. Not only did I find that the women left the position in a variety of different ways, but their departures could be classified under one of four themes.

The women who participated in this study left their superintendency in five different ways. There were four women who went directly to another superintendency, seven participants who went back to a position in PK-12 that was not a superintendency (although two of these women did go back to the superintendency in the position that followed); four women left for a position in higher education; one woman left public education to work as a consultant; and four women truly retired and no longer worked for pay. The number of women who actually “retired” from the position (because they had become fully vested in the retirement system) brings the total number to 12, however, eight of the women continued to work in at least one other position after earning their years of retirement. A visual representation of each woman’s path after the superintendency can be found in Figure 1.

I collapsed the reasons the women left the superintendency into four themes: it’s not the job I thought it would be; the struggles with family; taking care of herself; and I’m not the right fit for the community. Within these four themes are a variety of subthemes which provided further clarification for why these women left the position. These

Figure 1

Visual representation of jobs after leaving first (or only) superintendency in VA



reasons include:

- Wanted to return to a position that focused on instruction
- Conflict with Board of Supervisors/City Council
- School Board election
- School board micromanagement
- Leaving to spend more time with my husband
- Taking care and spending more time with aging parents
- Assisting with grandchildren
- Taking control of her health
- Needed a job with higher pay to supplement retirement
- Went to a more prestigious superintendency with higher pay
- Struggle with a small, rural community
- Living in a fishbowl
- Isolation and loneliness

A number of the reasons why the women in my study left the superintendency tended to be similar to findings in previous research. Leaving for another superintendency, a changing school board and/or micromanaging school board, challenge with the community, family considerations, retirement and health. The women in the study often explained it was rarely one reason why they would leave a position. Another finding worth noting is that even the women who moved to another superintendency provided the same reasons as the women who were abandoning the position altogether.

In some cases, it was a mutual feeling when the superintendent departed. Not only did the woman want to leave, but the school board wanted her out of the position as well. In other circumstances, the school board was disappointed with the departure of the superintendent.

While many of the women shared portions of their stories with pride exclaiming how they felt they were “trailblazers” “paving the way” for women superintendents after them. In many aspects of the rest of their lives, however, they were unable to set aside the traditional female roles – a supportive wife, a good mother, a caring daughter – and these roles often played a part in the woman’s decision to leave the position, most often through retirement.

Out of the 20 participants in the study, only two would classify their overall experience as overwhelmingly negative. I asked all 20 women if they had the opportunity to do it all again would they have made the same choice of career. Every woman reported they would go for the superintendency again but would, “do things differently,” “go in with my eyes wide open,” and “be more selective where I applied.”

Conclusions

The importance of fit.

Fit is a postmodern construct best understood as a game specific to the politics and relationships between school administrators and the communities they serve (Tooms, 2006; Tooms, Lugg, Bogotch, & Hernandez, 2007). In this game, such communities, who ultimately governs a school, set the rules for how an administrator is to be and not to be. These rules are sometimes written but most often

simply expectations that become understood over time (Tooms & English, 2010, pp. 223-3).

As the previous quote highlights, fit is often perceived to be a reason for a superintendent leaving a position. As Duke and Iwanicki (1992) explain: “*We define fit as the extent to which a leader is perceived to be appropriately matched to a given context*” (p. 26).

Fit from the School Board’s point of view.

It is disconcerting to see that so much of the research that has been conducted on fit (Duke & Iwanicki, 1992; Tooms, 2006, 2007; Tooms, Lugg, & Bogotch, 2010) shows that there is not an objective way that people are being judged as fit for a position. Instead the classification of a “misfit” by a school board should be recognized “for what they really are: empty measures, stereotypes, and prejudices” (Tooms et al., 2010, p. 99). When exploring the “fit” of the female superintendent through my participants, one woman, Tracey Leibson, shared that as she and her school board were negotiating her departure, “fit” was referenced a number of times. She went on to explain:

I love when school boards talk about not being a fit. They never seem to pull out concrete evidence like improving test scores or additional programs for students, but you hear a lot about “perceptions.” In my case, and for many other women, fit was code for “not male.” The superintendent who replaced me was male. Many of my female counterparts who didn’t get a renewed contract were most often followed by a man. It was as if a School Board

said, “Well, we gave this woman superintendent thing a try and it didn’t work out. Let’s go back to what we know.”

I was intrigued by what Tracey had mentioned. When I looked into each woman’s original hiring in the superintendency, I found seven of the eight women had replaced a male superintendent when they were hired. I also wanted to see what the school board chose to do when these eight women left the position. By reviewing newspaper accounts, I found that five of the eight school divisions hired a male superintendent following the departure of the female superintendent participating in this study. Out of the remaining three divisions that rehired a woman after my participant’s departure, two of the replacement female superintendents both had tenures under two years. In contrast, the male replacement superintendents had, (and in some cases) continue to have, long tenures in the position after replacing the female superintendent.

When one is deemed to be the best “fit” for a position in educational administration, the community has decided which person represents what they believe a school leader should look and behave like. Therefore, the traits of identity as well as role expectations vary depending on how a community defines what an acceptable leader *is* (Tooms et al., 2010, pp 114-5).

Fit from the superintendent’s point of view.

School Boards were not the only ones who spoke of fit in terms of job satisfaction. A number of the women specifically referenced their decision to leave the superintendency because they realized they were not a fit with the district. When I pressed further about what they meant, one woman told me:

Kerry, when I decided I wanted to be a superintendent, I set my focus on the position. I applied to all superintendent openings. I wasn't discriminating because I knew there weren't very many women superintendents and I just wanted to get the job somewhere, anywhere. Since you are giving me the opportunity to reflect, knowing what I know now, I think if I would do it again, I would really try to find a strong match. I would want a better fit for me.

When I continued to question those women that specifically mentioned fit, they explained that the challenge was most often due to the fact they were going to a completely new community and in many cases, a different type of school district. For the 13 women who took superintendencies in rural school divisions, six had never worked in a rural division before taking the position. This means that almost half of these women were entering much more than a new position, they were being exposed to a different way of life than they were used to. Similarly, three women went from small rural divisions to larger, more prestigious divisions, and they explained they were unprepared for the exposure and scrutiny after coming from their former positions. As Catherine March explained, "You never get used to seeing yourself on television and since our school division was big news, I saw myself on television a lot!"

Does age matter?

Age played a large role in a number of the stories that I heard as we worked through a woman's career path as she shared experiences leading up to her departure. In many cases the story of age began as the women were attempting to earn their

superintendency. According to the findings in *The American School Superintendent: 2010 Decennial Study*, 40.8% of the women surveyed were age 51 or older when they achieved their first superintendency versus 20.6% of men who were aged 51 or older. These quantitative results reinforce the qualitative findings of Kamler and Shakeshaft (1999) who found that school boards and search consultants were seeing experienced female educators aged 55-60 applying for their first superintendencies when males in these districts were choosing to retire at 55. "The board's looking [to replace] somebody who is retiring at fifty-five and the women who were applying for the job were fifty-eight and had never been a superintendent. Board members were saying 'Well, wait a minute.' (p. 57)."

Once the women were in the superintendency, they wanted to do what they could to succeed and stay in the position that they worked so hard to achieve. Post, DiTomaso, Farris, & Cordero (2009) found that women with high levels of expertise (both in terms of education and training) who operate in traditionally male-dominated careers are often quite hesitant to leave a field in which they struggled to initially gain entry.

This was particularly true if a woman "retired" from a position but had the intention of still working in education. While a number of women said they wanted to keep working after their superintendency, sometimes their age played a factor in getting another job. As Karen Dudich explained:

I'm really disappointed that now my age is against me, and I think if I was a man, that wouldn't be a factor. But the last job that I was one of the two finalists for, the consultant called one of my

references and said, “Does she have the energy for this job?” The English translation for that statement is, “Isn’t she too old?”

“Retirement.”

The word “retirement” was used throughout the interviews with my 20 participants. However, the definition of what that word meant varied among participants. For example, many times the women used the word “retirement” instead of “vested,” meaning they had met the qualifications to earn full benefits in the state retirement system. Other women used the word “retirement” in a way similar to the study by Onyx and Benton (1996) which simply meant they would continue to be active in part-time employment, continuing education, volunteer opportunities, or serve as a family caretaker. Finally, there were a few women who used retirement in the truest sense of the word. These women were going to pursue the path described by Simmons and Betschild (2001) where women “turned to new beginnings that afforded a new sense of freedom, of possibilities, where time and space are rearranged to enable a sense of freedom not earlier evident, in order to explore new, otherwise dormant or restricted interests” (p. 64). The decision to retire often was often also tied to a husband’s decision to retire.

Financial obligations and security often played a part in a woman’s decision to leave. There have been studies that propose that since women are less financially prepared for retirement, this is one reason they continue to work longer than male counterparts (Etaugh, 2008; Vickerstaff & Cox, 2005). In some cases with the participants in this study, the women were going to take superintendencies wherever they were offered. Especially in small, rural divisions, this meant that the women were

being paid less than other administrative positions elsewhere. As one woman explained, “I couldn’t even compare my salary to other superintendents; I knew there were some secondary *assistant principals* in large counties that were making more than I did as the *division superintendent*. It was crazy!”

The current state of the economy also played a large role in a woman’s decision to retire. A number of women in this study had second houses they needed to sell in order to be able to stop working. In Violet’s case (as explored in Chapter 4), she will never be able to retire until she sells the house she was required to buy when she was superintendent. Violet has not been superintendent in that county for over two years, and yet she still has to pay for a house she no longer lives in. Her post-superintendency job choices were deliberate so she can “hopefully earn enough so I can really retire one day.”

Safety in choices.

Because of their age, many of the women in my study knew that they might only have one term in the school division, but their age wasn’t going to stop them from achieving the position. In fact, eight of the women in my study had already reached the age and years of employment requirement to be fully vested in the state retirement system before they even entered the superintendency. As one woman explained, the fact that she could leave at any time and still receive full retirement allowed her to be less concerned about certain aspects of her new position:

People had warned me ahead of time that working with my school board would be the biggest challenge. I never said this to people out loud, but I always kept it in the back of my head, if I really didn’t

like the school board (or any other part of the job for that matter), I knew that I could pick up and go. Luckily, I didn't feel like I had to go and stayed for my full contract.

The "safety of my age" allowed some of the women to feel they could "make the decisions that were right for the kids" and could "let me keep the power in the case of when it was time for me to leave." For three women who knew they were not going to be reappointed, they opted to leave the position through retirement instead of allowing the school board to not renew their contracts. By announcing their retirement ahead of time, these women made it appear that leaving was their decision instead of "allowing the school board to decide my fate."

Sexuality.

Age also played a large role in the perceived sexuality of the superintendent. The younger the female superintendent, the more threatening sexually she was perceived to be by others. This included school board members, community members, and spouses of other superintendents. Nancy Wilder shared an experience where she first met other superintendents' spouses:

In June, there is a superintendents' banquet at the end of the year.

Now I had been in the position the whole year and all the male superintendents had been extremely wonderful and supportive...I went to the banquet alone because I was single and I wasn't dating anyone at the time...I had on a simple, white, very conservative dress...Well, everywhere I went to put my purse down to sit, one of the superintendents would say, "That seat is taken." It was because

these men had their wives there and suddenly, I was treated so differently. I couldn't understand the dynamics of that. I *still* don't understand the dynamics of that night. Were the men thinking their wives would be threatened that there was a female superintendent and that she was going to steal their husbands? At one point I was afraid that I was just going to have to go home because I wouldn't be able to find anywhere to sit. How humiliating! And it hurt more because these superintendents had been so friendly to me before.

A woman superintendent also made adjustments to her meetings because of the possibility of perceived relationships between herself and other men in the community.

As Lisa Ingalls explained,

I always made sure when I went out with male board members or a male member of my own staff that there were at least three of us at the table. It made me angry that so many of my male superintendent colleagues could just get things done over a quick lunch but I had to spend time strategically planning who would be at the table with me so it wasn't perceived to be romantic.

For the younger superintendents, gossip about dalliances with men in the community (especially those women who were divorced or living apart from their husbands for the job) were something they all said they needed to be aware of. As one participant explained, "I didn't want rumors to damage the good work I was doing in the district and I certainly didn't want those rumors to prevent me from any other superintendencies in the future."

Dealing with male versus female expectations

As I reviewed the findings from the interviews with these 20 women, I tried to determine from the stories I had heard, which subfindings were more likely gender-specific and what findings would generally be role-specific. As I returned to my list of 13 different reasons, there were most likely only five subthemes that would likely be classified as role-specific reasons for leaving the position: (a) conflict with Board of Supervisors/City Council; (b) School Board election; (c) School Board micromanagement; (d) needed a job with higher pay to supplement retirement; and (e) went to a more prestigious superintendency with higher pay. The other eight themes appear to be gender-specific reasons for leaving the superintendency.

“Paying back my husband.”

Often a woman’s decision of when to retire was directly related to when her husband was choosing to retire. Similar to a study conducted by Simmons and Betschild (2001), a husband’s decision to retire, as well as the family’s reliance on the husband’s retirement, often was a primary determinant of whether a wife would retire at the same time. When I would ask about that decision and why some women chose to retire in the middle of a contract instead of completing their term, the decisions were related directly to their husbands. This shows that a husband’s retirement is often more influential to a wife’s decision to retire than vice versa (Smith & Moen, 1998). The women shared the joint retirements as “the chance to finally do things together;” “the opportunity to travel and do the things we couldn’t do while working;” and in some

cases, “I needed to pay back my husband for all the sacrifices that were made while I was superintendent.”

In a future study where I examine why men choose to leave the superintendency, I will be curious to hear if any of the male participants explain that they chose to retire in order to “pay back their wives.” I think the language that many of the women in this study chose to use demonstrates that while they may have been pioneers in many ways, many of these women still hold a relatively traditional view of the domestic role of a woman.

Woman as caretaker.

According to multiple studies, women supply the majority of unpaid care for aging parents (NAC & AARP, 2005, 2009; Takamura & Williams, 2006). For three participants in this study, the women chose to leave their superintendency to provide care of their parents. This echoes research on adult daughters providing care for elderly parents (Allen & Walker, 1992; Brody, 1985; Gilligan, 1982; Magai & Halpern, 2001). In the stories of these three superintendents, two women left the position completely and the third woman moved to a different superintendency to be closer to her elderly parents.

In addition to the role of caretaker for parents, two other women left to provide care to ill spouses and one other woman used the birth of her first grandchild as an opportunity to exit the position to fill the role of “Nana.” In all of these instances, the superintendent felt she needed to leave her position in order to serve as a caretaker of some sort, either as “nurse,” “companion,” or “doting grandmother.”

What is true versus what is the whole story?

This study provided me with a wonderful opportunity to meet a number of women who held the position of superintendent in the Commonwealth of Virginia. As a researcher, I made a point to do whatever I could to make each participant feel comfortable as she shared her story with me. In many cases, these stories involved a great deal of lead up before we ever got to the issue of why she left the superintendency. I realized that in some cases, the path to the superintendency played a key role in one or more of the reasons why a woman would leave, but in most situations, the story of the path to the superintendency was a way to share pieces of her story that was safe and would allow for trust be established between researcher and participant.

While I gained a great deal of insight from the reasons the women gave as to why they left the position, I couldn't help but deconstruct these stories further. Out of the twenty participants I interviewed, eight were not being asked to remain as the superintendent. This meant these women were fired, bought out of contracts, or not reappointed. In some cases, the woman found a way to leave the position before the board could enact the sentence; in other cases, the board did tell the woman she would not be returning to the position. In seven eight of these cases, the women never talked about being dismissed and how that made them feel. There was only one woman who really exposed herself when she spoke of her anger, disappointment, and how this forced departure really injured her self-concept:

I won't hide the fact that it hurts your feelings. When the board votes to let you go, you lose some of your confidence. You're not as

sure of yourself as perhaps you might have been at one point and these feelings stay with you. I was hesitant to apply for a superintendency again. I just wasn't sure if I could do it.

The fact that so many of the women neglected to share what really happened and how they dealt with it made me wonder would I ever truly know what was the whole story behind why a woman would leave the superintendency? Ironically, while many of these women did not feel comfortable enough to expose the emotion behind the story of their departure, they were often quick to fill me in on the details of how and why other women superintendents left. Because of the availability that technology affords us, I was also able to review press coverage of the superintendent leaving a district. Even from that angle, I wondered what was true versus what I was told or read. I am thinking even with follow ups, I may never know.

The definition of socialization is “a continuing process whereby an individual acquires a personal identity and learns the norms, values, behavior, and social skills appropriate to his or her social position” (Dictionary.com). People are socialized to know what to say as professionals. A superintendent is trained to be savvy in the information he or she shares. In addition to that, socialization also imposes additional norms and expectations for what women should and should not say.

Perhaps it was the years and years of socialization that prohibit the women from actually sharing how they felt and what really happened. According to an article by Anne-Marie Slaughter in *The Atlantic* entitled “Why Women Still Can't Have It All,” she explains that describing departures from a position appears to be a challenge in government as well: “In Washington, ‘leaving to spend time with your family’ is a

euphemism for being fired...Thing about what this ‘standard Washington excuse’ implies: it is so unthinkable that an official would *actually* step down to spend time with his or her family that this must be a cover for something else” (pp. 4-5).

Recommendations

Implications for educational leadership programs.

According to Baker, Orr, and Young (2007), colleges and universities offering school administrator preparation includes 503 Master’s degree, 169 Ed specialist degree, and 195 doctoral degree in leadership preparation programs that produce 16,000 masters’ degree graduates and almost 6,000 specialist and doctoral graduates annually. Only a fraction of these programs address the preparation of a superintendent. Many programs provide the requirements for licensing an administrator PK-12. Some programs may have a course on the superintendency, others have no coursework at all. It is imperative for programs to have courses/programs that reflect the updated reality of the superintendency.

These superintendent preparation programs need to present both the research and reality of superintendent succession. Women aspiring to the superintendency also need to be presented with the understanding of the complexity of the role. This includes not only the multifaceted layers of the politics of the position, but the added challenge of maneuvering through gendered expectations.

Implications for school boards.

It is difficult to replace a superintendent. This position operates as the primary visionary and mission leader for a school system. All stakeholders must begin again when a new superintendent is appointed. It also is expensive to replace a

superintendent at all times, but with many districts struggling with crippling budget cuts, it is all the more important that the superintendent is a good fit. Based on figures from “Salaries and Wages Paid Professional and Support Personnel in Public Schools 2010-2011” the average nationwide salary for a school superintendent was \$161,992 (Educational Research Survey, 2011). According to Kaye (2000), one can estimate that replacing an employee can cost between 70-200% of the previous employee’s salary. Choosing a strong candidate that will remain with the district should be a primary consideration for school boards and search firms when hiring a new superintendent. From the stories of these women who have left, it still appears that a great number of expectations that are set by school boards are gender related. A female superintendent may be “given a chance,” but if the board deems her not the right fit, most often that board will return to a male superintendent.

The four women in this study who believe they appeared most successful in the eyes of their school boards were women who had been promoted to superintendent from within. The school board believed there was a level of safety promoting a woman who they had watched over a number of years. In the case of women who earned the job from outside, they proved a double risk. They were not only an unknown, but they were also a woman.

Implications for sitting superintendents and superintendent associations.

As evidenced by the number of stories reflecting the long hours and the stressful nature of the position, novice (as well as veteran) superintendents need additional support from other superintendents in providing assistance with work/life balance

issues. One suggestion from a superintendent in this study was to provide a new superintendent with talking points when discussing the position with her family.

Recommendations for future research.

This study included twenty female participants who served in the position of superintendent in the Commonwealth of Virginia and left the position. Future research should be conducted in other areas to further validate and explore other possibilities for people exiting the position. These recommendations include:

- Conducting an identical study except interviewing only male participants to determine if the reasons and stories behind why men leave the position have similarities or differences with the study of female superintendents.
- A study that explores the reasons and stories of why women choose to stay in a particular superintendency.
- Conducting a comparative study including both men and women but specifically identifying participants who left the superintendency, not including retirement, and did not return to the position.
- A study encompassing states beyond the Commonwealth of Virginia, specifically states that have a strong union presence to see if bargaining and salary caps play a determining decision in whether women leave the superintendency.
- A study that incorporates representation of women from all ethnic backgrounds, African American, Asian, Caucasian, Latina, Native American, and Pacific Islander to determine if the reasons and stories behind a woman's departure are any different.

- A comparison between the reasons and story a woman gives for leaving the superintendency, compared to the press coverage of the departure, versus the account as told by members of the school district community (district office workers, school board members).

Closing

Traditional texts, preparation programs and understanding of the superintendency often do not include a postmodern feminist analysis, which offers both a disruption of certainty and an identification of social structures that diminish the understanding of marginalized participants. By gathering these stories which highlight how a superintendent behaves, it then requires us to return to the advice, notions, and theories presented in leadership preparation programs, district aspiring administrator academies, and formal and informal mentoring to make sure we are including the experiences of these women. If we are not, we need to revisit what is missing in order to provide an altered perception of the superintendency.

According to the Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, "Quick Facts on Nontraditional Occupations for Women," *2008 Annual Averages*, a male-dominated occupation is defined as one that contains 25% or less women in total employment. While the most recent AASA superintendent decade study found the percentage of female superintendents to have now reached 24.1% (Kowalski et al., 2011), the position can still be officially categorized as male-dominated, especially when you consider that "women constitute approximately 75% of the teaching force, the pool from which superintendents begin their career journey, but they are disproportionately underrepresented in the top positions in schools" (Shakeshaft et al., 2007, p. 104).

For real growth, however, it means in many cases, for the first time, the job of the superintendent will be taken out of a completely male framework. We will incorporate the experiences of both men and women in the position. Previously, when women found they didn't fit, it was most often because they were being measured with the wrong set of metrics. Moving forward, women in the superintendency should no longer be viewed as the "token" that Kanter spoke of in 1977, but instead as a model for a new expectation of what the position of superintendent should look like.

Currently the superintendent is mostly described as a CEO, a business metaphor that doesn't necessarily evoke images of social change. Team leader, movement leader, pastor, mother, and human rights advocate are all descriptions that ring of change, much more so than does CEO. Translating the work of leadership and administration into the work of change is likely to appeal to women. This is where meaning-making is most likely to occur (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, p. 91).

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APPENDIX A

Participant Invitation/Request Letter Version

Dear _____,

As current doctoral student at Virginia Commonwealth University, I am interested in continuing the body of research in the area of women and the superintendency. Most specifically, I am interested in exploring the factors that cause women to leave the position of superintendent and to determine how women construct the story of leaving the superintendency.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you were identified as _____. I hope that you will agree to assist me in this endeavor, as your input will enhance our knowledge of leadership and career decisions of women superintendents.

If you decided to become a participant, please fill out the letter of informed consent. The letter of informed consent is required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Virginia Commonwealth University to ensure that proper permission has been granted by the participant. In addition, please fill out the demographic and career path survey (enclosed) and mail it back in the self-addressed stamped envelope or complete it online by going to the following secure website www._____

Any and all information that involves you in conjunction with this study is completely confidential. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and if at any time you no longer choose to participate, you are free to discontinue your participation in the study.

If you have any questions about this research study, please feel free to contact me by phone at (804) 253-7555 or through email at robinsonk2@vcu.edu.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. I am looking forward to working with such a dynamic group of women leaders and hope that you will be able to participate.

Respectfully,

Ms. Kerry Robinson

Enclosure:
Informed Consent (IRB)

APPENDIX B

Participant Invitation/Request E-mail Version

Dear _____,

As current doctoral student at Virginia Commonwealth University, I am interested in continuing the body of research in the area of women and the superintendency. Most specifically, I am interested in exploring the factors that cause women to leave the position of superintendent and to determine how women construct the story of leaving the superintendency.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you were identified as _____. I hope that you will agree to assist me in this endeavor, as your input will enhance our knowledge of leadership and career decisions of women superintendents.

If you decide to become a participant, please fill out the letter of informed consent. The letter of informed consent is required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Virginia Commonwealth University to ensure that proper permission has been granted by the participant. In addition, please fill out the demographic and career path survey (enclosed) and mail it back in the self-addressed stamped envelope or complete it online by going to the following secure website www._____

Any and all information that involves you in conjunction with this study is completely confidential. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and if at any time you no longer choose to participate, you are free to discontinue your participation in the study.

If you have any questions about this research study, please feel free to contact me by phone at (804) 253-7555 or through email at robinsonk2@vcu.edu.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. I am looking forward to working with such a dynamic group of women leaders and hope that you will be able to participate.

Respectfully,

Ms. Kerry Robinson

Attachment:
Informed Consent (IRB)

APPENDIX C

Participant Invitation/Request Phone Script

Hello, may I speak with ____ (Participant Name) _____

Good (morning/afternoon/evening). My name is Ms. Kerry Robinson and I am a doctoral student at Virginia Commonwealth University in the Department of Educational Leadership. I am interested in continuing the body of research in the area of women and the superintendency. For my dissertation, I am interested in exploring the factors that cause women to leave the position of superintendent and to determine how women construct the story of leaving the superintendency.

____ (Participant Name) _____, you were selected as a possible participant in this study because you were identified as ____ (name former position) _____. I hope that you will agree to assist me in this endeavor, as your input will enhance our knowledge of leadership and career decisions of women superintendents.

I would like to share with you some information if you decided to become a participant in my study. If you are interested in participating, would you please share with me your email address? Thank you for sharing that with me. After our phone conversation, I will email you the letter of informed consent. This letter is required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Virginia Commonwealth University to ensure that proper permission has been granted by the participant. Please sign the letter of informed consent and mail it back in the self-addressed stamped envelope I will send you.

I do want to share with you ahead of time that any and all information that involves you in conjunction with this study is completely confidential. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and if at any time you no longer choose to participate, you are free to discontinue your participation in the study.

After you have reviewed the letter of informed consent that I have sent over email, if you have any questions about this research study, please feel free to contact me. My telephone and email contact information will be in the email correspondence.

Are there any questions about the study that I may answer for you now?

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today and for your consideration of this request. I am looking forward to working with such a dynamic group of women leaders and hope that you will be able to participate.

Have a good day. I look forward to hearing from you.

APPENDIX D

RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

TITLE: The Career Path of the Woman Superintendent: Why She Leaves

VCU IRB NO.: #HM 13573

This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask the study staff to explain any words that you do not clearly understand. You may take home an unsigned copy of this consent form to think about or discuss with family or friends before making your decision.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore women's decisions while in the superintendency as well as decisions for leaving the superintendency. We are interested in understanding how the role of curriculum and student learning guides women's decisions.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND YOUR [YOUR CHILD'S] INVOLVEMENT

If you decide to be in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form after you have had all your questions answered and understand what will happen to you.

Participation involves being interviewed up to three times by a doctoral candidate researcher from Virginia Commonwealth University. These interviews will last approximately 45-90 minutes each. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio tape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made.

Significant new findings developed during the course of the research which may relate to your willingness to continue participation will be provided to you.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

I do not anticipate either risk or discomfort, however, if there are any subjects you do not wish to discuss or feel uncomfortable at any time during the interviews session, you have the right to decline to answer any question and/or to end the interview.

BENEFITS TO YOU AND OTHERS

You may not get any direct benefit from this study, but, the information I learn from people in this study may help me more clearly understand career decisions and leadership styles of women superintendents.

COSTS

There are no costs for participating in this study other than the time you will spend in the interviews.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

There is no payment for participation in this study.

ALTERNATIVES

The alternative to participating in this study is to not participate.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Potentially identifiable information about you will consist of your survey responses and your interview data. Data is being collected only for research purposes. I will not identify you by name and will use pseudonyms for names and places. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.

Only the student researcher will be present at the interviews and the student researcher and PI will be the only persons to have access to raw notes or transcripts. This precaution will prevent individual comments from having any negative repercussions. Tapes and transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet. Files will be encrypted and password protected. Pseudonyms will be used to identify superintendents.

Only the student researcher and superintendents will be present for the interviews.

Identifiers will be removed from all data. Data will be coded with a key stored in a separate location. Paper-based records will be kept in a locked cabinet and only accessed by study personnel. Electronic records will be made available only to those personnel in the study through access encryption. Audio recordings will be transcribed and then destroyed within three months of the close of the study.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You do not have to participate in this study. If you choose to participate, you may stop at any time without any penalty. You may also choose not to answer particular questions that are asked in the study.

QUESTIONS

In the future, you may have questions about your participation in this study. If you have any questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, contact: Kerry Robinson, Doctoral Student, Department of Educational Leadership, Virginia Commonwealth University. 804-253-7555; robinsonk2@vcu.edu or the Principal Investigator, Charol Shakeshaft, Ph.D., Professor and Chairperson, Department of Educational Leadership, Virginia Commonwealth University. 804-828-1940; cshakeshaft@vcu.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact:

Office for Research
Virginia Commonwealth University
800 East Leigh Street, Suite 113
P.O. Box 980568
Richmond, VA 23298
Telephone: 804-827-2157

CONSENT

I have been given the chance to read this consent form. I understand the information about this study. Questions that I wanted to ask about the study have been answered. My signature says that I am willing to participate in this study. I will receive a copy of the consent form once I have agreed to participate.

Participant name printed	Participant signature	Date
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Principal Investigator (PI) name printed	PI signature	Date
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Student researcher name printed	Student researcher signature	Date
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APPENDIX E

Interview Theme Protocol

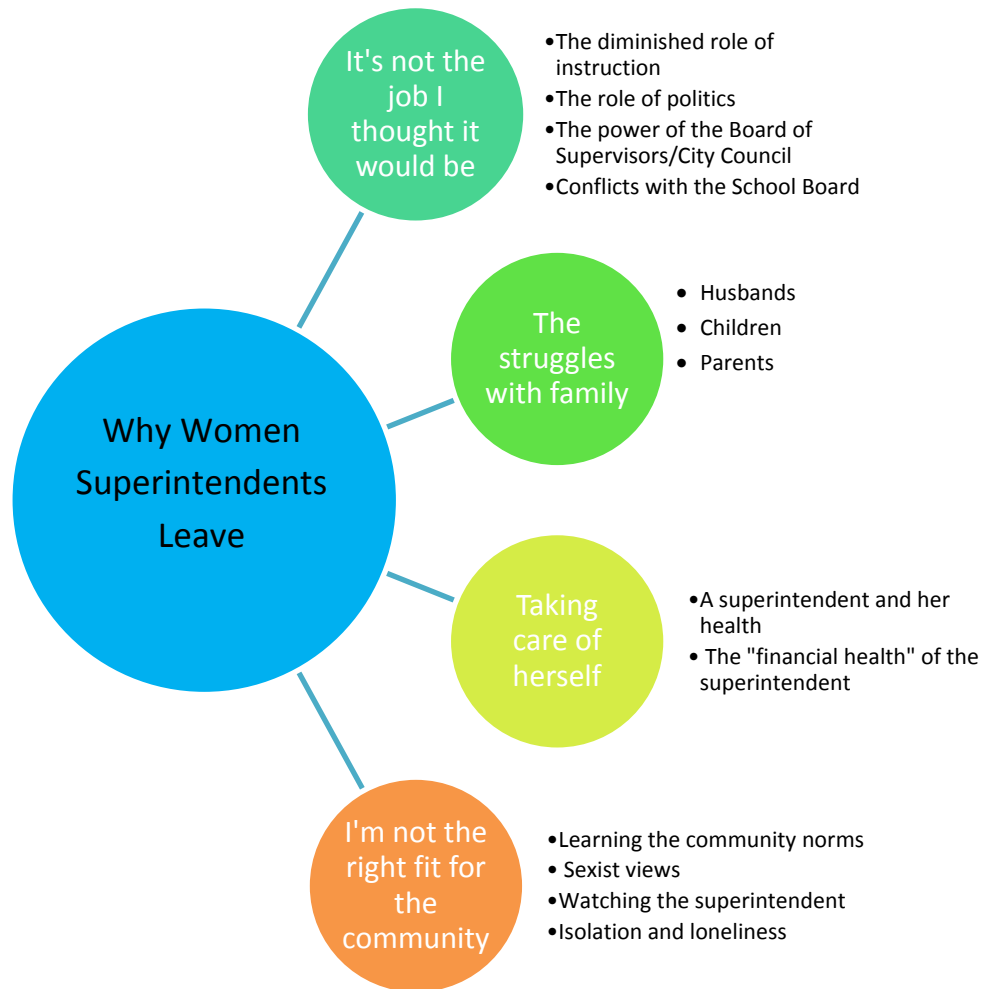
Interview Protocol – The Career Path of the Woman Superintendent: Why She Leaves

These interviews are unscripted but will focus on a number of topics. The interview will begin by asking the superintendent to “tell me about your superintendency.” Themes and topics to be explored include:

- A description of the job, the context, the division.
- An inquiry into the goals/initiatives she set for the position/school division.
- An exploration of the reasons why the superintendent moved on from that position.
- A discussion of the constraints or barriers of the position, to include supports and family issues. Where appropriate, questions about the challenges of relocating to a new geographical area will be pursued.
- An inquiry into support systems in the division and out of the division, to include mentoring or sponsorship relationships as well as support groups of women, church, family, etc.
- An examination of race and gender issues at play during the time she was superintendent.
- Descriptions of her relationships with her cabinet, other employees, community leaders, etc.
- An inquiry into goals she set
- Questions that probe differences and similarities between her last superintendency and other positions she has held.
- Examination of the relationship with the school board.
- Reflections about leadership decisions, lessons learned and advice to other women

APPENDIX F

Themes and Subthemes



Vita

Kerry Kathleen Robinson was born on September 28, 1970 in Perth Amboy, New Jersey and is an American citizen. She spent her K-12 years living in Metuchen, New Jersey. Kerry received her Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from Michigan State University in 1992 and her Master of Arts in Special Education with a concentration in Learning Disabilities from Kean University, Union, New Jersey in 1997. Kerry also completed an administrative endorsement through Virginia State University in 2002 and a gifted education endorsement through the University of Virginia in 2005.

Kerry has worked as a special education teacher in both Perth Amboy, New Jersey and Colonial Heights, Virginia. In addition to her teaching in Colonial Heights City Schools, she also held the positions of elementary assistant principal, K-12 instructional specialist, director of instructional administration and director of assessment and data.

In September 2010, Kerry joined the faculty of Virginia Commonwealth University as the research director for *Project ALL: Authentic Learning for Leaders*. This \$5.2 million US Department of Education grant is a partnership between VCU's Department of Educational Leadership and Richmond (VA) Public Schools designed to train the next generation of Richmond assistant principals and principals.

While in pursuit of a terminal degree from Virginia Commonwealth University, Kerry was inducted into the Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi in 2009; selected as a David L. Clark National Graduate Student Research Scholar in 2010; and inducted into the Alpha Epsilon Lambda Graduate Student Honor Society in 2012. She also has presented at the UCEA Conventions in 2010, 2011, and 2012 as well as the AREA Conference in 2011 and 2012.

Kerry is the author or co-author of four publications which include:

Shakeshaft, C. & Robinson, K. (2012). Educational leadership and gender. In J. Banks (Ed.) *Encyclopedia of Diversity in Education*. NY: Sage.

Robinson, K. (in press). Why do women leave the superintendency? In E. C. Reilly & Q. Bauer (Eds.) *Women Leading Education Network: Challenges and Barriers for Women Leaders* (pp.xx-xx). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Shakeshaft, C., Mann, D., Becker, J., Reardon, M. & Robinson, K. (in press). Toward fidelity: Simulation-based learning for school principal preparation and professional development. *Planning and Changing*. (Special issue examining innovative principal leadership preparation practices).

Newcomb, W. S., Mansfield, K. C., & Robinson, K. (in progress). Where do we need to go? Setting forth an agenda for women in leadership. In W. S. Newcomb, & K. C. Mansfield (Eds.), *Women interrupting, disrupting, and revolutionizing educational policy and practice*. Educational Leadership for Social Justice: Information Age Publishing (IAP) Series.